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ABSTRACT

This diary presents the personal experiences and observations of an intern in an open classroom located in an inner-city London school. The school was based on the following principles: 1) All young children learn by self-selected experience; 2) All young children need a wide variety of experience in all expressive areas; 3) Learning should occur in a carefully prepared, planned environment through activities initiated by student and or teacher; 4) The essential relationship in the classroom is between teacher and child; 5) The nature of the activities is task oriented, not teacher oriented; and 6) The activities are integrated in time and in content. Each chapter deals with the multi-faceted experiences and observations of the intern. Presented in a diary form, chapters concern the headmistress, the first day, the headmistress' principles, a staff meeting, the basic approach by the teacher, personal involvement, difficult children, family grouping and child versus teacher initiated activity, and the teachers' daily role. Reflections of the intern indicated a strong personal satisfaction with the open classroom. (MJM)

This booklet is the second of a three-part review of activities sponsored by the NAIS Committee on Teacher Training. The first was Preparing Teachers for the Integrated Day, *by Edward Yeomans, published by NAIS in January 1972; the third will be a report of the Greater Boston Teachers Center, scheduled for 1973.*

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of a series

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by

mary t. garry

Foreword by EDWARD YEOMANS

Associate Director of Academic Services

NAIS

with photographs provided by the author

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Foreword

HOW to help good teachers become better ones" is the chief question before the Teacher Training Committee of the National Association of Independent Schools. This question has been addressed in a number of ways in booklet form. (See *The Nurture of a First Class Faculty*, by David Mallery, and *The Wellsprings of Teaching* and *Preparing Teachers for the Integrated Day*, by Edward Yeomans.[1]) The methods that are examined include a variety of suggestions for strengthening the preparation of a beginning teacher, for creating a supportive atmosphere within the school, and for planning "workshop" experiences in the summer. Two methods remain to be described: that of year-round support from outside the school (the teachers' center and advisory service) and the internship. In the account which follows, we now have the record of a successful internship, presented in full color and high readability by Mrs. Garry.

Mimi Garry, as she points out, had taught for nine years before she began her internship with Mrs. Kay. This fact was important to the quality of the experience that she had in Mrs. Kay's school, for she brought to it a great deal of informed receptivity. Schools that are considering a budget for sabbatical leaves for teachers would do well to keep this in mind.

Mrs. Kay, on her part, is clearly an extraordinary master-teacher and human being. Her example was no less articulate than her words. Teaching, as she professed it, is an art that has its discipline and craft, but also has qualities of the heart and spirit. These were not lost upon her children — nor upon Mimi Garry.

There will never be enough Mrs. Kays to go around, but for that matter, there are not many Mimi Garrys either! We can rejoice when two such teachers meet, respond to each other, and throw clear light upon the dynamics of teaching and learning. Furthermore, as an added attraction, we are helped to see a competent headmistress in action with her parents, her children, and her faculty, as well as with an intern-teacher. It is a stimulating picture.

The NAIS is grateful to Mrs. Garry for permission to publish her manuscript and photographs.

EDWARD YEOMANS
Associate Director of Academic Services
National Association of Independent Schools

[1] All published by the National Association of Independent Schools.

Introduction

THE origins of this paper lie properly in my personal past. I was ill as a child, and was in bed during kindergarten and first grade. I remember the shadow in the doorway of my twice-a-week tutor, the feel in my hand of my first hardcover book, the pictures and print upon its pages, the sense of strength and deliverance I derived from being able, despite other disabilities, to do something significant for myself. And because the tutor came only twice a week, I must have discovered sooner than many students that learning is something you do well and truly for yourself, along lines of your own interest, with encouraging but not constant assistance from others – that one is, in the words of my own paper, "enabled" by a teacher, and goes on to enable oneself.

This discovery was not entirely rewarding at the time. When I entered Brearley School, in New York City, in second grade, isolation had made me intellectually independent, the only independence I could afford, but stubborn and self-centered as well. The school was progressive, flexible, and responsive to student need. Between us, we struggled for nearly seven years to a satisfactory meeting place, during which period my report cards faithfully describe resistance, nonparticipation, underachievement, and outright rejection of a good deal of the curriculum. I think a lot of the patience I have now with difficult children comes of remembering how prickly I was in their place.

I stumbled unwilling through grammar, French, arithmetic, Greek wars in outline form. What I remember with the same clarity as the tutor's shadow is:

- illuminating my own medieval manuscript on parchment

- preparing and serving, with class-made costumes and décor, an entire Viking feast
- playing Cassandra in the *Trojan Women* in Grade 5
- devouring the school library
- going on photographic tours of the lower East side of New York City and working up my own prints and enlargements
- learning Latin, of all things, from a lady who loved it so much she made you want to speak it live: all activities which allowed for direct, personal interaction with either task or teacher.

I eventually made my peace with constituted requirement, or else I became interested in a wider variety of material. Both, I guess. In any case, I graduated with enthusiasm from high school to college, to marriage and motherhood, with no thought whatever of becoming a teacher.

The decisive input, however, occurred inadvertently during two college summers. I worked as strictly unskilled labor in a remedial teaching camp in Maine, giving boys from eight to eighteen years of age extra practice after their daily lessons with the qualified staff. I enjoyed my relationships with these students, and felt it was mutual. I helped them with their short vowels, they helped me to water ski. I encouraged them to read aloud, and recorded their progress; they encouraged me to come up to the rifle range and recorded my scores on the target sheets. And I was moved and impressed by the transformation that occurred in these boys, as whole persons, as they felt the power growing in themselves to master difficulties that had bugged them all their learning lives. Echoes, I know, of myself. And satisfying to me, also, having been through it all, to translate these echoes, even minimally, to the enablement of others.

Ten years later, faced with the imminent reality of independence and self-support, I decided to become a teacher. No burst of insight or purpose guided this decision. All I can say is that it felt right and has felt so ever since.

I doubt that I would be where I am today if I had started out as a classroom teacher. Faced with the simultaneously combined needs of twenty-five to forty children, I would almost certainly have settled for a least common denominator approach to assure my class some coverage of subject matter, and myself some peace

of mind, and I genuinely appreciate the motives of those who have done so. Starting in good fortune as I did, in remedial work with singles and small groups, I learned first to focus on individual need and then to work increasingly in group situations without losing this focus.

It was my great good fortune, also, to work with Nancy Morse in the Lower School at Buckingham School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She gave me seasoned counsel, personal support, and complete autonomy to develop my own teaching style. At its heart, always, has been a particular respect for the child as person, for the person as learner, and for the validity of differences in individuals. Time and again, I reached the ostensible "learning problem" by the back door. I shuffled cards to a perfect "bridge" with some, mounted photographs or organized stamp albums with others, read *Winnie the Pooh* to one who told me that he had never had a childhood and wanted to fill in the *Charlotte's Web* and *Pooh* holes privately with me. Time and again I saw the reward of leading through respect and through the child's own interests to the sticking place, and easing past it with a planned series of challenges and a lot of mutual trust.

As the years passed at Buckingham, I grew restless. The children remained fascinating, the problem-solving aspect also. But I wanted to expand and had basically two choices: (a) to become more specialized in learning disabilities and continue to work with individuals and small groups, or (b) to work with a larger classroom and a wider range of activities.

After-school experience in Roxbury and Cambridge confirmed my preference for the latter. Someone, I knew, would always be available in an independent school to do my kind of trouble-shooting. But the inner-city was something else again. I worked there, felt its pull and the possibility of making a useful contribution. I contributed little to the inner-city scene in Boston. Rather, I learned a lot about what I didn't know and what needed to be done.

The solution came, like David Hawkins' "Bird in the Window," when a wife-with-husband move to Canada brought an end to my work at Buckingham, broke the habit patterns of a decade and opened the avenue to Mrs. Kay's school in inner-London. The experience speaks for itself.

M.T.G.

Mrs. Kay

THE school is located in an old building in a slum section of South London, where crime, mental illness, and school dropout rates are all high. Built in brick, three stories tall, it rises severely out of its paved, bare, and unequipped playground. The main facade, entrances, and a large part of the playground never see the sun, a fact which contributes to a grey and brooding atmosphere. The building and playground are entirely surrounded by a thick ten-foot brick wall with heavy wooden gates. On first sight it is not a promising prospect.

Mrs. Kay, the present Head, took over the school in mid-term one December, a few days before the scheduled Christmas play and the unscheduled bursting of the water pipes, both of which events occurred, unhappily, on the same afternoon. During the previous three years, there had been a turnover of three Heads and twenty-seven teachers for eight positions. Parents were forbidden to enter the school grounds — they parted from their children at the brick wall. Inside, the classes were large and completely unruly. The children scrapped and roughhoused among themselves, stole and broke equipment, paid no mind to the staff, and accomplished little. With older children, the teachers might well have been frightened. With the infants, they suffered total frustration.

"You couldn't make yourself heard," said one. "You couldn't begin to work with any group because of the overall noise and chaos. You couldn't control them. They just laughed at you. When you spoke to them, they mocked you with rude remarks. They'd push right by you in the hall and nearly knock you down and never notice. You might as well not have been there at all."

Mrs. Kay's arrival at this disaster area was timely and intentional. She had been teaching for several years at a public school in a wealthy neighborhood across town whose parent body was professional, well-educated, and ambitious for its children. Its program was conventional, but sound and thorough. With the concurrence of the Head of the Infant Department there, Mrs. Kay, in charge of a top group of Sevens, introduced what she generally describes as "our free way of working." A lot of misunderstanding and loose jargon surrounds the method. In the States it is mistakenly called the Leicestershire Plan. In fact, the Leicestershire Plan refers to innovations in the secondary school.

The term "open structure" is used, but can mean structure of activities or structure of student body group, depending on who is speaking. "School of the integrated day," "the integrated activities program," and simply "the open classroom" are three more terms. These are probably the most definitive, but they, too, fall short, because while the method has certain basic principles, it has evolved differently according to the needs and decisions of particular Heads working with particular staffs and groups of children, many of whom were not, until recently, in communication with one another.

Therefore, when I asked Mrs. Kay one day whether she thought her methods were similar to or different from those in, say, Oxfordshire, she said, "Probably not very different. The thing is that a lot of us have arrived at the same ideas by different and personal routes, and are only now realizing how much we have in common."

The description of the method – what it looks like, feels like, and sounds like from day to day, in one school – is the subject of this booklet, and its essence cannot be stated fully at the outset. But certain outstanding features of theory and practice may be noted now and elaborated upon later.

- Every child develops physically and cognitively at his own individual rate.
- All young children learn by self-selected experience.
- All young children need a wide variety of experience in all expressive areas.
- Learning should occur in a carefully prepared, planned environment through activities initiated by self and/or teacher, and in contact with a variety of dedicated adults – teachers, students, parents, and interested outsiders.
- The essential relationship in the classroom is between teacher and child, not teacher and class.
- The nature of the activities is task-oriented, not teacher-oriented.
- The activities are integrated in time and in content. There is no daily schedule, just a morning and an afternoon period of unblocked time. The activities are integrated in the sense that an interest in today's temperature may well involve productivity in reading, writing, model-making, math, measuring, and painting in any sequence.

"Our free way of working" worked very well on its first trial in the affluent school and gradually spread through that whole infant department. Over time, in a number of discussions, Mrs. Kay heard her methods praised in terms of middle- and upper-class children. They, of course, would benefit because of their already rich and broadly-based background. She also heard many doubts expressed about the applicability of her methods to children of any other background. She claimed firmly that while results would differ according to the starting point of any given child, the method would work anywhere in the culture because it depended on human development. Eventually, and with a strong personal attachment to the disadvantaged, she decided to prove the point. She asked the Inner London Education Authority to give her a very difficult infant school. And it did.

There was a great deal to do at once, and as always, a great deal still remains to be done. The building was only slightly altered. The bathrooms in the playground were torn down and others constructed inside the main building. French doors were built into the wall facing the playground, to increase light and access to the yard. Doors were cut between the classrooms, desks removed, the furniture and equipment brought in. Bookshelves went up all along the corridor walls, and books arrived to fill them. Very little of the equipment was new or generously financed. Walking into any room, one would think that every used carton in London had somehow arrived there. Mrs. Kay's student budget is one shilling a week per child ($4.00 per child per year). She has attracted some money and materials from various funds and interested parties, but most of the overall inventory is homemade, second-hand, or community-contributed, and very simple. Books, for instance, of which there are an unbelievable number and variety, have come new from stores, borrowed from libraries, donated from hither and yon. Many other items also have arrived from rummage sales, discounted sell-offs, and diverse contributions.

During the Christmas holiday, Mrs. Kay walked around the neighborhood calling on parents, introducing herself, telling them of her plans for the school. Most of the parents were too astonished to find her in their homes to discuss these plans with her. Shortly after Christmas she held her first parent meeting, attended by one hundred and seventy-five of the most hostile faces she had ever seen. Throwing aside her prepared speech at the last minute, she announced to them that they had a lousy school here, a really lousy school, and that they deserved it for having put up with it for so long in silence. She told them to help and

cooperate with her in giving their children a new kind of learning experience. "Give me a year of your patience," she said, "before you start criticizing my efforts." The rest of what I have to say in this booklet describes that school as it is now, in September, at the beginning of her third year as Head.

I think it is significant that my following account of Day One is so formal, routine, and dull.

Day One

MY actual impressions of my first day were so many and so dizzying that at the time I couldn't sort them out at all. I walked in on a Thursday morning, met the room teacher, and asked her what she wanted me to do. She gave me one suggestion only, good advice for any teacher. She said, "Get to know the children." They were distributed all around the room, busy, talkative, examining materials, seemingly self-sufficient. I had no names for any of them and no familiarity with the materials in the room and so could not keep long in mind what each one was up to.

I watched a group making a cardboard giant, and said to myself, "Ah, I can join in here and get talking to them that way." Two children were painting the sides blue, another was rolling up paper to make his arms. One girl, standing on a desk with scissors in her hand, said to me, "'Ere, Miss," pointing to the giant's side, and there followed a stream of explanation and request out of which I understood not one word. The Cockney was too much for me, but the message seemed to be about putting a hole in the cardboard for her. This I did. "Now 'ere," she said, pointing to the giant's other side. "No – *up*!" she corrected, so the two holes would be at the same height from the floor. The arms were inserted in the holes, raffia was attached as hair to his head, the several children working alone or in a team to complete the model, with no need of me for anything.

Taking stock of myself at that moment, I felt useless and bewildered. "I don't know what to do with myself," I thought, "and when they ask me to do something for them, I can't understand a word they say." The rest of the day was quite similar. There was no break in the activity of the room until lunch time, and none again after lunch until 3:30 P.M. The children continued to eddy about in different pursuits and combinations –

active, busy, changeable, noisy, and I mostly eddied about after them, sitting with one little group and then another, watching what they did, putting in a word here and there, and answering their questions about me. By 3:30 I was exhausted.

I do not believe my experience is at all uncommon. Many people, visiting this school, or others like it, for one day only, have my exact reactions, and are apt to report afterwards to others that it was bedlam. I was better prepared than most, by previous experience and philosophy, for what I observed. I am amused now to read a statement that I, myself, made a year or so ago to a group of tutors, working with school failures in a ghetto section of Boston:

> A child is a person first and a learner second. His success as a learner will depend a great deal on the personal relationship that develops between you. As teachers, yours is more than anything an *enabling* role. You are there to guide, assist, stand by, encourage, and share an experience in which a child responds again to his inborn curiosity.

Yet, here I was, in my ideal environment, and it was so new to me that I couldn't recognize it, let alone appreciate it.

That evening, determined to make some sense of the day, I wrote this dull account, and it shows quite clearly the extent to which I could not see the forest for the trees and in desperation ended up just listing things. The rewards of working in this school were many, both personal and professional, and high among them was the growing perspective of the forest, the Whole, with the constituent parts fitting increasingly into place.

Day One – In General

The room I'm in, and it's similar to the others, is divided into areas by low, two-shelved bookcases and by corrugated paper roll, attached to the backs of tables, or to what looks like clothing racks strung together. There are several desk clusters, a sand table, a water table, a play house in the corner, a puppet box, painting and construction tables over by the sink. One floor area is large enough to hold the whole group, with a rug, small foam mattress and chairs, and books on shelves and holders on a peg-board wall. There is no blackboard.

Materials around the room include the following:

- *Sand Table:* Molds and containers, calibrated and household.

- *Water Table:* Various measures, tubes, and funnels.
- *Science:* Clocks, mirrors, magnifying glasses, prisms, magnets, two aquaria, plants. This many are on display. Other equipment is stored, to be retrieved as needed, in a cupboard below.
- *Math:* Three scales — a bathroom scale, a weight scale, and a balance; baskets of bottle caps, buttons, lentils, shells, pine cones, plastic counters, horse chestnuts, etc. Measuring devices: ribbons, sticky paper strips, straws, shoe store foot measure, tape measures, rulers, and yardstick. Geometric shapes and puzzles, counting rods, number cards, dice, dominoes by picture and number, Chutes and Ladders.
- *Craft Shelf:* Wool, weaving cards, needles, thread, string, remnants, foam stuffing.
- *Painting and Projects:* Paint, brushes, paper, glue, scissors, scotch tape, newspapers and magazines, paper bags, innumerable used grocery containers.
- *Wendy House:* Doll bed, dolls, child-sized cot, dinnerware storage cupboard, dressup evening gowns.
- *General Activities:* Blocks, puzzles, picture Lotto, word Lotto, picture concentration cards, skanateales railroad, cars, trucks, animal boxes and barns, animal tray, Playplax, Playskool workbench, heavy metal machine part with many nuts and bolts, Fit-Bits.
- *Writing Corner:* Blank notebooks, pencils, crayons, paper of various sizes and colors, wall-mounted alphabetized vocabulary card holders, personal named manila folders. Our room does not have its own stove, but ideally it should have. Cooking is a hugely popular activity with all young children and incorporates reading, writing, measuring, thinking, counting, weighing, and sharing in a thoroughly enjoyable task.

Outside our classroom is a great rectangular hall with windows on three sides. In another school the hall would doubtless be used for an assembly. This school never has an assembly. The center of the hall is open space, the two sides are divided along the wall into separate areas by the eternal corrugated paper roll. One of these areas, equipped with stove, tables, and various bowls and utensils,

is for cooking; others, with small chairs, benches, and bookshelves, are for reading and talking. At the far end, a television set surrounded by couch and chairs shows BBC's Playroom and other programs every morning for such children as wish to watch. The school piano, other instruments, and a record player are here also for music and dancing. The hall is always used for music, TV, and cooking. For the rest, it is useful for painting a mural, building a dragon, playing a game, putting on a play, or any other activity requiring a large clear space.

The class group since opening day has consisted of about sixteen six- and seven-year-olds, all of whom have attended school before. The five-year-olds will be added into each classroom, a few at a time, starting next Monday. Total class size will be between thirty and forty, after additional admissions at Christmas and Easter.

The day begins. No opening exercises. Children filter in from the yard and begin to play with whatever they choose. A popular project this morning was making a giant out of four large cartons piled one on top of another. The children did everything themselves except cut holes in the cardboard where it was too high and too hard for them. The teaching principle seems to be, "Let the children do as they please. If you see a way to stretch the experience in which they are already involved, do so."

Current bulletin board exhibits: Many drawings and paintings. Several project-oriented displays. One paper has objects taped to it and the caption, "These Things are Made of Wood." Another has two sets of drawn objects, each set enclosed in a circle. One circle is labelled, "Big Things," the other, "Small Things," another paper has gummed strips glued to it to make a bar graph. Each strip is labelled with a child's name, and the caption reads, "We measured our heads. Collin's head is the biggest. Wendy's head is the smallest." Each of these exhibits represents a child-initiated activity.

Discipline: There is some. Some children who were splashing paint all around were asked to stop. A boy was set in the corner for hitting someone. Another was sent in from the playground to the Head for making trouble. If you spill all the lentils, you clean them up yourself. Materials are returned to the manila folder and the folder to its proper place before another activity is begun.

In theory, a child can do exactly as he wishes all day long. The Head made a point of this to me this morning, with the example that if a child needed to play football in the yard from now till Christmas, that would be all right with her. In practice, this is

rarely the case. One teacher said today that she sees to it that the older children do their writing either in the morning or in the afternoon; the implication was that other teachers do the same. The music teacher says, "Most children come to music voluntarily, but several teachers send the reluctant anyway, because they usually enjoy it when they get here." I am also told that every teacher in the school can give you three or four examples of children who would simply do nothing but fool around throughout the infant school years, if permitted, and that each teacher moves to give these children direct supervision and individual help. In our room, one group never got out of the dress-ups and Wendy corner all day long, but this is only day four in the school year.

The reading instruction seems more formal than the math. Its source is the manila folder. The folder contains word cards chosen by each child. Every child wants *mummy*, *daddy*, and *his own name*, and a certain number of basic vocabulary words: *dog*, *little*, *book*, *light*, based on a look-and-say approach. Many of the older children, at some point in this day, spread out their cards, named them, and wrote words and sentences with them in a special writing book. As they know their words, more are added.

The number of cards in each folder and the use the children made of them varied widely. Some children copied single words in long lists; others wrote phrases and short sentences. Some children found one pattern sentence that worked, and used only words and phrases that fit, i.e., "I like mummy." "I like daddy." "I like the dog," etc., which ignored all the other vocabulary. Others were more experimental. The letter formation was really poor in some cases. My room teacher said to correct it in passing.

Math principles were in some evidence, but in a more casual fashion. Some children made counting picture books – one fish, two fish, three fish, four fish; equivalence and "more than-less than" was in the weighing.

Grouping: Everything was done by the individual, either alone, or by choice with others. The only group activity today was a story just before lunch.

An Afternoon With The Head – Basic Principles

I was asked to look over and help sort the new reading books in Mrs. Kay's office. When I entered, she was shoeless, on her knees on a toy- and book-covered carpet, decorating the outside of a science paper with pinking shears for the proud author. The paper title was "Things That Sink," and on four slotted spaces below the title were strips of paper, each naming something that had sunk or not sunk in water a few minutes before. This scene is significant in several ways. It speaks to the personal, informal manner Mrs. Kay has with her students, and to the spontaneity with which the children come to her office; it speaks to the immediacy of the child's work, to the value of teacher approval, and to the way approval is given.

The scene repeated itself all afternoon long, with variations. In each case, a child or children came comfortably into her office with a product – this is easy to do because there is no anteroom and no intervening secretary. If the door is ajar, anyone may enter. (This is true also of the staff room: even with the door closed, children may pop in from time to time to ask a question or sit down for a minute.)

Mrs. Kay did not give her approval to every product. In one case, two girls came in with a picture of trees and some animals that can be found in them. They had a pig in the tree, and when questioned, admitted it didn't belong. The squirrels were bigger than the cats, and a discussion of bigger-smaller ensued. They were told to go back and do it again. I questioned this, and was told that she would of course approve anything that represented either growth or excellence, but that this was neither. She knew the girls, knew they could do better, and said so.

Similarly, three small boys brought in a scribble picture each. She said they were nonsense, gave them a package of magic markers, and told them to go back and think about a good picture and bring back the result. They did, and the second product was well-formed, balanced, and colorful, and she approved it warmly.

Our conversation touched on a number of topics. I asked her if she had a curriculum, and she said no, not in any sense that I was

used to. The philosophy of the school is based on the work of Piaget and can be roughly described as follows: Young children need a rich variety of experience to produce clear concepts. The school aims to provide this rich variety with its environment and materials and to extend it through the positive intervention of its staff. Its goal is that the children should be able to think and express themselves clearly. Any activity in which they engage can be used to develop this capacity.

Learning is a continuous process in which the repetition, the sequence, and the assimilation of experience are all-important. Reading, writing, math, and other well-known school subjects are necessary but not exclusive areas of experience, and competence in these areas is not the goal but the outgrowth of concept development. Reading and writing must be thought of as vehicles of clear communication that a child wants to learn as he develops the ability to express himself orally. When he does want this, the teacher helps him with it. Mathematics, certainly, but this also comes naturally out of dealing with amounts and comparisons of things; scientific concepts develop from observing the properties of certain things and how they change under different conditions. The "Things That Sink" paper is an illustration. The child not only learned about sink and float, but also that the wood, which was heavier in the hand than the pebble, floated while the pebble sank. That being the case, I said, a number of questions arise.

Q – If there is no body of knowledge which the children should acquire and they're all doing different things all the time, how can you keep track of what thirty children are doing from day to day, and how can you be sure that some child in the school won't complete the infant school years without any knowledge of tool subjects.

A – You can't keep constant track and you don't try. However, in the family group system, a heterogeneous group of children aged four to seven, each child is with the same teacher for these three years, and a good teacher would of course know over that period of time what level of work he was doing. The involvement of the group in a variety of activities encourages variety for all. One child may not indeed read for several months, but will likely do little else for another several months after.

Q – If there is no emphasis on tool or content subjects as such, and no learning which the whole group does together, the good teacher neither can nor should plan ahead, right?

A – Plan, yes, but ahead no. Essentially, you plan *afterward*. The children demonstrate an interest in something and you help them carry it forward. But it's a tentative kind of planning. Right now I'm working on reading with a group, and we've been talking about houses and homes. This weekend I'll gather together some pictures and books about homes today and homes of earlier years, and some discussion material about homes generally. I'll bring it in on Monday. If they're interested we'll talk about it. Maybe, on the other hand, they've had enough and will want to talk and do something else. If that happens, I won't push it. I'll save the material. They'll come back and be interested another time. For example, we took a field trip to the Thames last winter to see the boats. We had expected a lot of interest in this trip, and we had various materials about different kinds of boats ready on their return, to encourage pictures, models, stories, etc. Do you know, the thing that interested the children most that day was a snail on the ground beside the river. For all we knew, they never saw the boats at all. When we returned, the projects went entirely to snails and snail tracks. So we put the boat material away. Then one day, near the end of school, a group of children got together and did a whole mural about the river and the boats they had seen that winter day. We brought out our material again, and this time it was devoured in a number of varied projects with genuinely motivated research into what the boats looked like, what they carried, how their equipment worked. The experience had borne fruit in its own time. In general, we mean to let the child lead the way, serve as resource person for what he wants to do, assist, if necessary, while his curiosity draws the pieces together, and help him, in conclusion, to describe the experience in his own words.

Q – If you had your way, how high in school would you carry your free way of working?

A – Right to the University.

Q – Doesn't it hurt, then, to have to send children on to a formal junior school at seven?

A – Of course, and one day, it won't be necessary. We're working on our integrated activities program in the infant school; other people are working on it now at the secondary level; in time we'll close the gap.

Q – What do you think survives of your influence in the child who goes on to the formal junior school?

A – A good deal. If the enjoyment of learning is once aroused it can be damped down in an unfavorable climate, but never killed. It will appear again in time. Obviously, the more pleasure a child takes in learning from the beginning, the stronger his commitment, but a good early experience always makes its mark. Also, our children have developed an inquiring attitude that will keep their curiosity alive, and they understand what they express about the work they've done with us. You can always go in educational sequence from understanding to rote learning, if the situation demands, but you can't go the other way round.

Q – Would it surprise you to know that some of your faculty do not entirely subscribe to your free-choice philosophy, and do have some standards about frequency of writing, reading, and math practice?

A – No. Many things happen in my school which are not altogether to my liking, but I have confidence in my staff and I respect their right to learn in their own way. I still do not believe any insistence is necessary in most cases. Over a three-year period, a normal child will avail himself of all the opportunities, and the wise teacher will make the most of his choices. The pattern in any one week may look unbalanced, but over time, it will not be.

Q – Would it surprise you to know that several of your teachers can identify children in their classes to whom they feel they must give explicit tasks if any learning is to result?

A – No. And for these children we must frankly supply a formal structured experience right inside a free-choice system. But I tell you this: if we are still having to do this after three years, I think we have failed that child.

Q – There's no structure, then, to the overall program, but within a given area there must be some. Isn't there some order and sequence, for instance, to the reading instructions once the child has demonstrated that he is ready and wants to learn?

A – Yes. I'm going to discuss the subject in some detail at Staff Meeting today.

Staff Meeting

AT Staff Meeting today, Mrs. Kay talked to us about sequential steps in reading instruction. She pointed out, to begin with, that these children do not understand many of the simple words that we use, and the meaning that we connect to them, and that an extension of their speaking vocabulary is essential before they can learn to read. Inarticulateness at the time of school entrance is often due to a lack of language facility on the part of the parents. Generally, also, children are discouraged from asking questions, which is their natural stock in trade during the early years. If mother and child get on a bus and the mother says, "Hold tight," and the child says, "Why?" he is apt to be told, "Hold tight and shut up or I'll wallop you!"

Early in the fall, a child crawled into school through a broken window, and was brought to the Head. The following fascinating dialogue ensued.

Head: "What are windows for?"
Child: "What are windows for?"
Head: "That's right. What are windows for?"
Child: "That's right. What are windows for?"

All of a sudden, it dawned on the Head that the child had no concept of what a question was, and what you were supposed to do with it, so he was imitating her, because she was the Head and she must be right. When she asked the boy's mother about his language level, she replied, "Well, 'e don't talk t'me, so I don't talk to 'im."

Sometimes the working hours of both parents keep them out of the house all day. When they come home, they are tired and they tell the children to be quiet, sit down and watch the telly, or go out and play. Sometimes there are just too many children to keep up with. It is not uncommon to hear a mother described as having

six at home and two more off and away. Many families around the school live in high-rise public housing where the elevators are frequently out of order. If they all go out, the mother has to dress up a number of children to look well, because appearance is a status symbol, and it's just too much bother, so she leaves them at home and shops alone. Eventually, these children are left alone more and more, and have no contacts with others. There is no reproach to be attached to any of this, and the school supports the home in every way possible, but the parents, on the whole, don't know the kinds of experience young children need and should have.

Interestingly enough, there is a striking difference between the parent body now and three years ago in its increased language facility. Mrs. Kay attributes this to school influence. As the children learn to use language at school, they force their parents into greater usage at home, and the whole family benefits. Citing examples of inarticulateness, Mrs. Kay mentioned the teacher who began to read *The Three Bears* to her class. The bears went off for a walk in the woods. "What's woods?" asked one listener. "Woods are trees all together in one place." "What's tree?" he persisted. There are trees near the school, and he was shown one. He had in fact seen it before, but had not known the word for it.

As an example of limited language and experience both, Mrs. Kay described one of the teachers who was growing plants in his classroom. He told the children that when these plants grew up, they would produce small red things that you could eat in a salad, and he asked them what they thought these might be. The first answer was, "Oh, it's going to be meat – meat before it's cooked." This child hadn't understood that this was something that grew in the ground, or perhaps he didn't understand the difference between meat and things that grew in the ground, and he didn't understand about salad and what you might expect to find in it. He had just got hold of that word "red," and the first edible red thing that came to his mind was meat.

So the first step in reading instruction is the development of oral language. All the activities of the classroom contribute to this anyway, but some can be geared to it specifically. Pictures – many, many, many varied pictures around the room – are useful in this regard. The children discuss them among themselves, draw pictures from them, write words about them, all of their own volition. The teacher also can show one to a little group and say, "What is in this picture?" And they reply, "It's a happy lady." The teacher asks, "Well, why is she happy?" And every time they

give an answer, the teacher asks another question that leads them to think further about the scene or the situation and to use more and more words to describe their impressions. "Try not to ask questions which invite a *yes* or *no* answer," she advised. "Use open-end questions, when you can, to draw out as much language as possible."

And when you're in the Wendy House, for instance, don't just respond to their make-believe. Assume a character yourself. Say, "Good morning, Mrs. Watson, I understand your sink doesn't work. What seems to be the matter?" Every time you create a dramatic situation and they rise to it, they grow in their real-life capacity to handle new experiences.

Telling stories is great fun and good language practice, but the children work into this slowly. One of our teachers has a rare gift for this – he tells more stories in his room than he reads. He wanted to encourage the children's participation, and he went about it in this way. He stopped every now and again (rarely at first, more frequently as they caught the spirit) at a highly suspenseful moment and asked, "What happened next?" And the children gave him an answer. By increasing the stops, he got them telling more and more of the story. When they were comfortable with this, he began telling stories with them in little groups in a circle. One child started, the next picked it up, the third continued, and so on. Every so often a miserable embarrassed silence fell over one of the narrators. Waiting and suggesting ideas only made matters worse, and then the teacher discovered that the solution was to give the story back to children who had spoken before and let them start it up again. By the time it got back to the embarrassed one, he was all right and ready to contribute.

While the oral language practice proceeds you should be creating the desire to read by reading a great deal yourself and showing everyone how much pleasure and useful information can be found in books. When the child brings in the turtle, find the book about turtles. Read about its food and its housing when he needs to know, and an essential connection will be made between living and reading.

Children like to hear favorite stories over and over again. They often prefer an old favorite for the tenth time to a new story for the first. Tape the favorites and keep the tape handy in the room. When a child wishes to hear a particular story he can take the book over to a corner and listen to it while he turns the pages, and of course, in this way, a fine interaction occurs between the seen

words and the sounds, the story in particular, and the enjoyment of books in general.

Mrs. Kay reminded us that the way we felt about books and treated them ourselves would strongly affect the children's attitude toward them. "Try to keep the books looking well, and take away the tattered ones. The children are very rough with books themselves and must learn to be more careful, but they don't like things in tatters. Display them properly and attractively around your rooms, where the children can see, and reach, and touch, and open them. And be aware of the difference between home and school on the subject of books and the importance of reading. Many of the homes from which these children come, say, in their surroundings and in the attitudes of the family, 'Reading is a useful tool for getting a license or a job, but that's all.' The school wants to say, 'Books are to be enjoyed as well,' and therefore, everything that we do with books either develops that attitude or discourages it."

"When you read a book to the children," Mrs. Kay said, "Take it from the book corner where they can see you do it. Read some books with pictures and some books without pictures. In this school, if you hold up a book and ask the children what you're reading, many of them will point to the print and the pictures both. They don't know that you're reading only the print. And many of them don't know what 'reading' means. One child, who was told, 'This word says *Mummy*,' thought he was deaf because the word wasn't saying anything to him. Talk about this with the children, and keep on talking about it. When you read a picture book, point out to them that the pictures can lead you to part of the story, but the words can lead you to more; and when you read stories without pictures, point out to them that indeed there are no pictures and that you're reading them the whole story from the words alone, and that they can do this too. It's important right from the beginning to make them feel that reading is fun, that it is within the reach of every child, and that it is not hard."

The manila folders with the little word cards come into their own here, Mrs. Kay went on. As the children hear stories, look at them, and repeat them, they come to want to write their own, and for this they need words. Words stand for what the child wants to say. In the beginning we give them each a few words on small cards. Little Louise made a sentence, "Louise is a girl." Then she made "Louise is a tiger," and burst out laughing. In that moment, she had seen the fun of words, and of changing them, and how the changes change the meaning.

Writing should begin with the reading. The children write the words they know and the sentences they can make from them. Never bother a bit about letter formation or spacing at the beginning. The only point is to have the written word mean something to the child. As time goes on, you can point out the customary space between words, but not until the child is really comfortable about his product. And only after that do you begin to say, "This is great, but I could read it better if you made this letter a little clearer, etc." The child's own spoken language must also be preserved, and you shouldn't try to change their written expression until, if at all, you change the oral because it just won't work. Their ears can't hear the difference, and they only get frustrated and give up.

When they do pictures or projects which require a short caption, they often like to rewrite the caption under the teacher's before displaying the paper on the wall, but be careful about this. Don't let it become a routine, because things you see on the wall day after day you no longer look at. Mrs. Kay pointed to the wall chart behind her and said, "I'm sure none of you now even notice that it's there."

Consider also the labels you have taped to the pieces of furniture in your rooms, and the building parts, like door, window, table, floor, etc. These labels are only useful when you use them. If they're there from day to day, they become invisible. If you want to use labels – and why not? – have ones that you keep in your hand, and ask a child on any given day if he would like to put them up. He will put up as many of them in the right places as he can, and at the end of the day you should take them right down again, to have ready for another child on another day. That way, the children will learn what these words are, but the other way, they'll never notice.

The same is true of wall display, she said. Keep changing it. If you are particularly fond of some pictures, or if there's some other reason for prolonged exhibition, fine; but if the only reason the same papers are up for over two weeks is that you haven't had time to take them down, make time, and put up new ones.

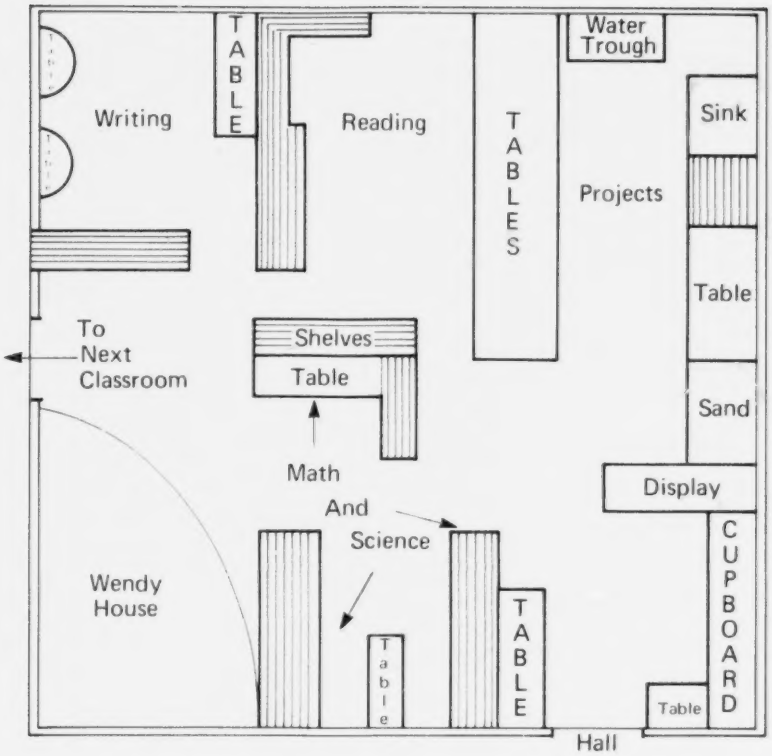
Reading, writing, and listening activities should continue in a reciprocal mix, each stimulating the others. As the individual word cards grow too numerous for easy handling, greater use is made of personal dictionaries and a common alphabetized vocabulary card holder. The children browse around among the books, reading those at their level, and phonetic instruction begins with a few children at a time, as needed.

Week Two:
Structure and Basic Approach

I went to school early this morning to observe while the Head helped a new teacher to rearrange her room. I have already mentioned the actual contents of the typical classroom, but the arrangement is important also, and this I had previously taken in without ever really noticing it.

The reason for the rearrangement was that the new teacher knew the present one was unsatisfactory. The children kept getting in each other's way with different projects and materials, but she didn't know why or what to do about it. The Head took one look, and started pushing furniture around. In a short while she had created ten distinct areas in that room: doll corner, sewing and craft corner, projects and painting, sandbox, water trough, science area, reading and writing area, math area, display area.

Corrugated paper roll is without a doubt the most widely used raw material in the school. It serves on the wall to substitute for bulletin or tack boards, and in the rooms as area dividers, stapled to the backs of bookcases, chests, or tables to produce a low but psychological wall. Bookcases, tables, and Wendy House walls are deliberately angled to minimize the boxy look. Best of all, it cuts the noise level which brick walls amplify.



Each classroom connects directly to at least one other through a doorway closed by a curtain instead of a door. After the first few weeks, these curtains are opened and the children move from one room to another according to a variety of different arrangements agreed upon by the teacher pairs. Two of the teachers have arranged their rooms specifically for open-flow, dividing the ten essential areas between the two: doll corner in one room, painting and projects in the other, etc. Some teachers allow free movement between the two rooms; others prefer an occasional visiting plan. Some of the advantages of the free flow system are these:

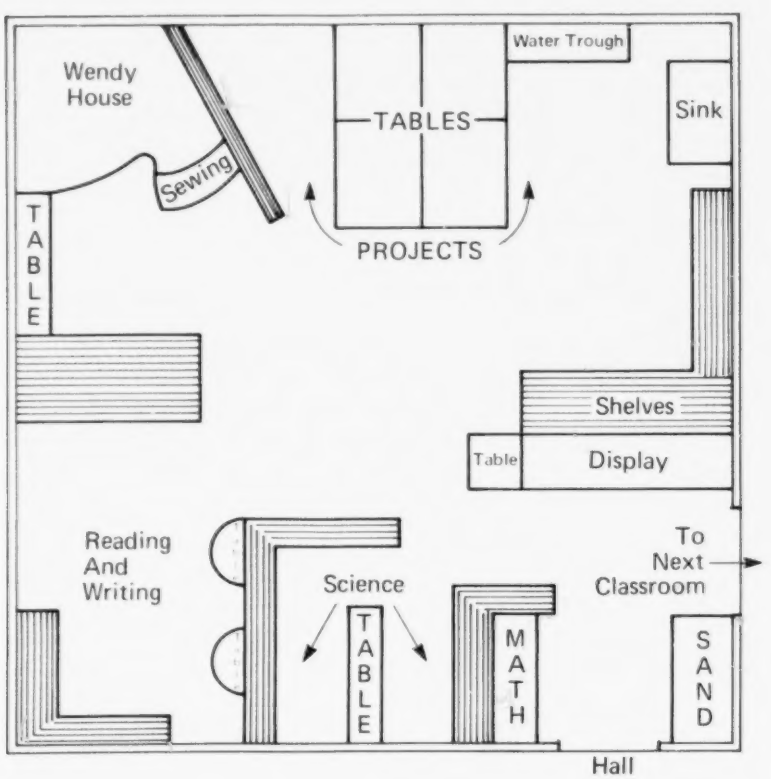
1. If there is a man teacher in one room and a woman in the other, there will be children who can benefit more from the relationship with both than with either one alone.

2. If a particular child does not have a strong relationship with his own teacher, he may be able to form one with the other one.

3. If one teacher is more experienced than the other, the first can help to improve the second through the interaction between the classes.

4. If there are particularly difficult children in either of the classes, the teachers can share responsibilities and relieve each other of the constant strain of keeping these children in hand.

The prime disadvantage is that the teacher tends to lose track of his own students. It can't be helped. If one child always does his



math and science with his best friend in the next room, the teacher can't keep track of what he is doing from the home room. This is particularly true of the split-activities classroom, where the children would always be out of the room for certain types of work. And it argues for a high level of continuous communication between the teacher pairs. My room teacher favors a nuclear-class setting, with occasional visits to the next or other rooms, explaining that this allows for novelty, for special projects, and the shared responsibility for the occasional menace, while keeping the overall body of work in one surveyable space.

I had a long talk with this teacher, after school today. She was teaching by conventional methods in this school when the present Head arrived. She stayed through the reorganization process and is now teaching for the third year under the present plan. I asked her to just start anywhere and tell me what it was like to teach this class, and the first thing she said, gazing into her well-earned coffee was, "It's tiring, very tiring, and very difficult to do well. In a practical sense you want to keep as many children as possible doing different things simultaneously, and you want to stretch each activity as far as it will go with each child in turn. Like as not they all need you at once, and you feel you haven't enough heads and hands to go round."

She said that, fundamentally, everything the children do and everything you say should contribute to a learning experience – language development, concept development, or other. Take something as simple as the child who comes to be zipped into a dressup evening gown. You don't just do it. You say, "Does this dress fit you, Joanne?" "Yes." "Would this dress fit Jennifer?" "No." "Why not?" "Because Jennifer is too short for this dress, it would hang on the floor." "Would the dress fit me?" "No, because you are too tall." If the children are serving play food in the Wendy House, you may say, "What are you having to eat?" One child will say "dinner," and you ask, "What is for dinner today?" Surprisingly enough, many of these children who have been served "dinner" for years, don't know that dinner has constituent parts that can be named, like peas and meat and potatoes, and they learn these names in class.

If a child brings you a picture, you don't say just, "That's lovely," if you can help it. You top that "lovely" with a question that requires further speech, further elaboration; and in some cases you write down what he says on the picture. Your every utterance, in point of fact, should be significant. Sometimes you can't think of anything to say. It's human, but you feel badly

about it, because you didn't make the most of whatever it was.

I had heard these precepts before, but it takes some daily exposure to convert them to practice, and they meant more to me at that moment than they ever had previously, because of my own experience during the day. I had brought to school a number of cloth fish and ducks, cut out and ready to be sewed. I had thought of the project in terms of manual dexterity, and helped the children with the sewing and stuffing. Now I realized that although we had talked some about what we were doing, every stitch had been an opportunity to stretch that experience more than I had. "What kind of stitch is this?" "A big stitch," "A tiny stitch." "What happens if the stitch is too big?" "It doesn't work." "Why not?" "Because the stuffing won't stay in." "What about this stitch?" "It didn't come through to the other side," etc.

Sometimes, of course, the children "tune out" questions, and you have to be sensitive to this too. Suppose you're zipping Joanne into that evening dress and you ask her if it would fit Jennifer. It just happens at that moment that she doesn't care a bit whether it does or not. She's very intent about being a mother getting her child ready for bed and calling the baby sitter so that she can go out for the evening. If you listen for a minute, you can hear this, and can talk to her about it. And maybe, being Joanne, a very self-assured determined character, she'd as well go about her business and not discuss it with you at all. You can sense that too, pretty quickly, and leave her alone.

With three years' experience, Adele has acquired an absolutely natural manner of questioning which is very hard for the beginner to sustain, and she also knows in advance that certain activities lead naturally to certain kinds of questioning. Weighing, or as she says, balancing, which every child enjoys, is a learning experience with a number of sequential steps. It is important that the teacher knows what they are and makes the most of each child's progression through them. The first is to establish the differences between heavy and light in the hand. A stone feels heavy, a bottle cap feels light; scissors feel heavy, a cotton reel feels light. This is repeated over and over again, with introduced variations such as the huge object that is light and the tiny one that is heavy.

Balancing occurs with both discontinuous materials which can be counted, like pebbles and pine cones, and continuous ones, like sand or water. The children experiment with one and then the other, and you lead them to observe, as they balance, that one side is lighter, one heavier, and then stretch it to, "Can you make this one, the lighter one, the heavier one?" A lot of time and trial goes

into this. Next, "Can you make them balance?" Then comes a long adventure in counting: so many pine cones balance with so many bottle caps; so many spools balance with so many pine cones, and eventually some of the children arrive at the further "ah ha" that if these balances are true, then the bottle caps will balance with the spools as well.

Concept development comes entirely this way. It is increasingly recorded on work sheets as the children are older and more able, and there are never any formal, rote, or repetitive task examples to check the learning. She said that one of the important points for a teacher in this school to keep in mind as she distributes her time and attention among the children is not how old they are in relation to their abilities, but how many years they will have in the infant school. Children from this environment really require the full three years before they are ready for the formal education that follows. They can miss out on a full term either because their birthday falls wrong or because they come one or two years late from another school. We have one child, Tracey (just six), who is supposed to "go up" at the end of this year. She was technically in school last year, but because of tonsilitis, an appendectomy, and a host of other ills, she was almost always absent. Until today, Tracey hovered silently around activities and other children, but took no part herself. Today she became involved in the Play-do and began to speak. She has all the growing of a Five to do, and only this year to do it in.

Five-year-old Christopher, by contrast, is all over the place and into everything. He is not very interested in fine motor activities, but it doesn't matter. He's bright, curious, and has plenty of time. He loves big splashy paintings, and huge corrugated paper models of giraffes and whales. He uses scotch tape by the yard. An older child, measuring head size, is pretty businesslike and self-assured, measures nearly everyone's head, tells you what to hold and what to write where. Chris, this morning, was content with six or seven heads and not too sure how to go about it. His measurement was casual to start, and the sticky strips on his graph were not all even at the bottom edge. Within the duration of this experiment, he saw the problem of comparing uneven lengths, and lined up all his strips correctly. The effort wore him out, and he said so, and he stopped. He is enthusiastic about whatever he does, he is observing the other children, and imitating them in areas of his own interest, and he has two years more in which to grow and become more skilled.

Adele had a record book in hand while we were talking. When I asked her how she kept track of individual progress, she showed it to me. Here is one page:

Week of Oct. _____

Name	Reading	Maths	Expression*	Other
Robert E.	Enthusiastic Initiates activity Remembers new vocab. from day to day Wrote new book this week. Read and taped it. Added 2 new words to his envelope.	Understands that balance is weight, not size or amount. Found many equivalents around room for one polished rock.	No painting No models. Considerable imaginative play with self-made Tinkertoy cars. Joined in bridge building (with car) with Colin and Paul.	Moments of solid bright-eyed concentration. Moments of aimless wandering. Playing less with the other Robert – more with Stuart.

*of all varieties – painting, clay, models, blocks, Wendy House, music, P.E., etc.

On the whole, she said, records are in your head. It takes at least a term, and maybe a year, to really get to know each child. The record serves mostly as a reminder. If, at the end of the week, you can't put down any comment for a given child under general, reading, or math, you make a point of spending some special time with him the next week.

Weeks Three and Four: Getting Involved

MRS. Kay said this morning that she was continually struck this term by the "innocence" of the children. "Do you remember the faces of the first lot we sent up?" she asked Adele. "Yes," Adele replied, "They didn't look or act like children. They seemed never to have had a childhood." "Our school has given this back to them," said Mrs. Kay.

This afternoon, we went to visit a new, modern classic showcase infant school, built specifically to house and facilitate an integrated activities program. Our school, of course, was built on a specifically formal and uninviting plan a half-century ago, and the faculty has mixed feelings about its conversion to meet their needs. On the one hand, they are justly proud of the many ingenious ways in which they have made do, and made their rooms really attractive with very simple materials. On the other hand, corrugated paper roll bends and buckles and has to be replaced fairly frequently. The building hasn't been painted since 1964, equipment is always wearing out or in need of repair. Adele says we should have a sign over the stockroom door saying, "We had one, but it broke!" And everyone thinks, at some time or another, "Wouldn't it be great if we had a really suitable plant; how much more we could do with the children."

The children had gone home when we arrived, so this was truly an inspection of building and equipment. It's a one-story building. The space is used in several ways. The entrance area is in a core arrangement, a lobby and display place with offices and conference rooms on two sides. One ell leading off from this is quite wide and deep and contains the auditorium-dining room, large and square, and two joined, but essentially enclosed classrooms.

Several of our teachers admired these two rooms and would have liked them for their own.

Around a courtyard run other long ells, one room wide, so the two outside walls are mostly windows, one side facing the street, the other facing the court. One of these ells houses the infants, and we looked at it in some detail.

Over a hundred feet long, and perhaps twenty-five feet wide, it was open from one end to the other, divided only by bays. The ell has been criticized for being too open, and indeed we had the feeling of being in a long, breezy hallway with no point or points of focus. None of us was very keen to work here, and we all appreciated the "kiva" at the far end, an enclosed wood-paneled, carpeted reading room with double bunk beds down one wall.

In terms of material equipment, we have more items than they on display in each room, and display is important if the child is to choose from what he sees available. This is partly because they have more built-in storage space, but it is also a difference in approach. Their rooms are essentially bare, set about with desk clusters, and ours are purposely divided by shelving into the specific learning areas, the shelves doubling as necessary space for storage and easy access. Our arrangement gives a child a certain security which the wholly free-flow ell does not.

There was a good deal of adult professional art work in evidence. Our art is entirely child-produced. Selections from the children's art were carefully mounted and displayed on the classroom walls. We have much more, and it is taped all along the walls – exclusively art along the corridor, and all kinds of work, not necessarily mounted, but plenty of it, on classroom walls from floor to ceiling. Our overall impression of the physical plant was that it was streamlined but rather antiseptic. Ours is jumbled, colorful, and cozier.

The Head of this showcase school feels that the proper use of the building depends not upon its construction but upon the teacher, and that young, new teachers are the most successful. Older teachers are dismayed by the openness, feel exposed, can't accommodate, and either quit or, in the main, don't apply. The teachers tend to work in pairs as we do; four teacher teams have worked together, but the coordination among the four has not been successful so far.

A discussion developed about the inculcation of tastes and values, set off by the common observation of the two Heads that the children were so destructive of toys and equipment that it was hard to stay ahead of one's budget for having continually to

replace what had already been bought. One Head said she thought the whole thing stemmed from the installment plan of modern life. Many of the children in both these schools live in welfare housing – it isn't theirs. They buy on credit – the purchases aren't theirs. Everything is here today and gone tomorrow. A child has so many siblings that even his clothes aren't his own. He puts on the first pair of trousers that fit when he gets up in the morning. He has no individual toys. They are taken and broken by others. Where could he possibly acquire a careful attitude?

Then someone mentioned that the careful attitude was one of our values as teachers, and that a criticism of each of our schools was that in its development of the individual and its effort to broaden individual taste, it was educating the child right out of his environment. This, of course, is like the old argument against better television in the States. "We're giving people what they want" always really turns out to mean, "We're giving people what they're accustomed to." And as Mrs. Kay said, "What we are doing, we hope, is to create a situation of choice. At present these children have no choice. We'll appreciate them and their activities and the things they enjoy, and ask them to do the same for us. The choice is always theirs, but they will have a wider base to choose from."

Both our schools have also been criticized for paying more attention to the social than to the academic progress of the child. Parents are always anxious when the younger child in the next flat knows some multiplication tables and their own can't read very well. Both Heads admitted to the bias and believed in it. If you increase a child's self-confidence, if you concentrate on language and concept development, he will learn the rote things when he needs them, and use them to his purpose. If you start with a, b, c, and twice two, and neglect the developmental foundations, you help to create the very failure and dropout situation that you are in business to avoid.

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Q – What did you do this week-end, Chris?

A – Don't matter. I only like the school days.

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Antonia, age 5, wants to do a weaving card. I get it set up and show her how to hold the needle. We talk about how to weave, and discover that she doesn't know what "over" and "under" mean. I reach for some random objects – scissors, a cereal box, a ball of wool. "The scissors are over the cereal box, Antonia. Now

they're over the oall of wool. Where are they now, Antonia?" "They're over the cereal box again." We try over and under in different combinations. Her weaving is by no means perfect after this, but she has the idea and starts off.

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I do some cooking with six girls, and this requires measuring sugar and flour. Flour is easy – two tablespoons even. Sugar is one and a half. No one is sure. So we cut up pies, represented by paper circles, and hand around half a pie from one to another; and then we cut a paper spoon in half and hand around half a spoon and a spoon and a half. Then we go out to the cooking area in the big hall, with a basket of cooking ingredients brought to school by the children – eggs, sugar, flour, margarine. Each child takes a mixing bowl and spoon from the shelf. Each measures out his own spoonfuls from the flour and sugar containers. We have several volunteers for cracking eggs. One egg almost always ends up on the table, but no matter. Scoop it up and into the bowl again. The only exclusively teacher task is to pour equal amounts of two eggs around six bowls by eye. Stirring and licking are equally popular all around the table. When the batter is ready I put two muffin tins on the table and each child fills four spaces. Then each washes and dries his bowl and spoon and goes back to the classroom.

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"'Ere, Miss, see my tank!" Chris is fascinated with camouflage; he's been drawing and constructing giraffes and splotching them up to look like the jungle. Now he's made a frozen-food box tank with a cardboard tube gun barrel and daubed it all over in green and brown paint.

Every day a number of children like Chris spend a thoughtful period of time making objects and creatures out of junk. By junk I mean no disparagement of either the material or the product. The materials are items common to every household – paper bags, cereal boxes, egg cartons, match boxes, yogurt containers, etc. Parents save them. Children bring them in. A new selection is available every day. Robert makes a sailboat from a margarine container covered with a newspaper deck. The masts are straws. He cuts the sails from paper and glues them into place. Sharon makes a doll's room. Paper carton for the room shape, small cereal box with top surface cut off for a bed, sticky paper square for a rug, upside-down yogurt carton with the cereal box top makes a table. Another box with four silver foil milk bottle caps on top becomes a stove with burners. One egg holder cut from the carton

is a bowl with tissue paper flowers. The barrel of Trevor's gun is a toilet paper roll. The teacher can help identify the shape names of circle, rectangle, triangle, but the children's choice of shapes is unerring and imaginative and is drawn from observation and transference.

Frances and Adele have made a book together. Adele has taped blank paper over the print of a small sized pre-reader, and Frances, looking at the pictures, has dictated her own story for it. She can't actually read it, but recites it perfectly. This little book has not been out of Frances' hands all morning. She walks round the room holding it pressed to her tummy. She has "read" it three times to Adele, once to me, once to Mrs. Kay, and once apiece to several friends. It will go with her tomorrow to the hospital while she has an eye operation.

In a story this morning, we read about Trubloff the mouse, who wanted to play the balalaika, and this brought up different kinds of musical instruments — the children do not know many by name, certainly not this one, though they saw immediately that you would play it as Brad plays his guitar.

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Afternoon: Antonia, still weaving, comes to me "in a muddle." You can almost predict a weaving muddle by the maturity of the child. Karen, Denise, and Jillian have each done perfect weaving cards, every thread in place. Pat and Linda love to weave, do a lot of it, and still make a number of errors — going over two, under one, over one, under three, etc., as well as turning back before the end of the row. Antonia does all of this, and unthreads the needle as well. I fix the muddle while she plays with a box top, a plastic man, and a cotton reel. Following my directions, she puts the man over the box top, the top under the spool, etc.

The cooking girls come back for their cooked muffins to take home, and I have some geometric blocks for them. "Show me one that is half the size of this one (a circle) and this one (a square) and this one (a triangle)." "What happens if you put these two together?" "You get a whole circle." "And these two?" "You get a bigger triangle." "Now you do it and ask me the questions." When I answer wrong, they laugh, and love to correct me.

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I went this morning with Mrs. Kay to a meeting of students in a training college. Adult students, many with children or grown families, they saw a three-year-old film of the school. Directly

after the showing, and not knowing that we were there, they made some comments about it, chiefly to the view that the children didn't seem to be accomplishing much, and that if they had had a nursery school experience, wasn't it time to get down to some real work. Mrs. Kay then went to the front of the room, introduced not as herself, but as someone involved in this way of working, and indeed the film had been fuzzy enough so that she was not immediately recognized.

Q – Can the children really do what they want all day long?

A – Yes, but the question implies a laissez-faire attitude that does not in fact pertain. If you want to make a stamp album, you have to look at all the stamps carefuly, identify them, sort them out, and lick them into the right places. You are doing what you want, but this requires discipline, concentration, and some drudgery.

Q – What about the child who seemed to be wandering about, not joining into anything. In a regular class, he would be doing something.

A – It sometimes looks that way, but actually a child in any situation has moments of retention and moments of wandering. Learning usually occurs in brief episodes. This one may be picking up all sorts of ideas from his wandering that would be impossible in a sit-down situation, but this film doesn't show that fruition.

(Curiously, during this question-answer period, no mention was ever made of the learning experiences that did occur in the film in areas of reading, painting, counting, construction, and principles of magnification.)

Q – Isn't a child of seven too old to be playing with blocks?

A – No one is too old to play with blocks. All of us are used to the idea that there are stages of physical development. We are less used to the idea that there are parallel stages of cognitive development. The materials may be the same, but the use will differ widely with the level of cognitive development. The three-year-old will pile up the blocks and knock them all down. The five will work hard to create a balanced design. The seven may decide to build a castle, and its building can involve all kinds of picture and reading research.

Dressing up is the same. When children first dress up, they recreate and express in their play the daily activities of life. Education, after all, is not just reading, writing, and arithmetic, but life itself. As the dress-ups continue, they can lead to dramatics on the one hand, and all kinds of investigating on the other, the depth and detail dictated by the maturity of the children. What clothes do people wear on what occasions? What materials and dyes are used for clothes and in what places? What kinds of designs? Where do these come from? How do animals' clothing – fur, hair, skin – vary and under what conditions? What kinds of clothes in design, color, and material have people worn at different points in history?

Consider a project that began in our hall with two children who had squeezy bottles tied on their back with string. Their teacher asked what they were being and they said "Divers," and she said "What have you seen under the sea?" "Fish." "What kinds?" "Big fish, little fish, fat fish, scary fish." "Why do you have those things on your backs?" "Because we need air." "Do fish need air?" "Don't know." "Well, let's find out. Come paint me a picture of what you saw."

Books appear on class shelves about sea creatures. Also shells and corals. The teacher reads a seaside story. The kinds of things you might find at the seaside are extended and discussed at considerable length because many of the children have no experience whatever of sea or seaside. An undersea mural results. Two fish are brought in from the market. The children dissect the fish to see how they are inside and what organs they have. Finally, to get at the bones, they boil off the flesh. Then a group of six or so go to the pet shop to buy an aquarium and two goldfish. More pictures, more stories, more models, more research into fish care and fish habits. And in all these experiences, the children are working together, talking together, thinking together, and expressing themselves in various media.

Q – My child has been in school a week. He has looked at all the equipment and played all the games. Now he says he is bored. He wants to learn something. Isn't play different from learning? Doesn't the time come when a child needs to be told what to do?

A – Most of us have been told what to do most of our lives. Half the time we didn't know what we were doing or why,

and many of us don't know how to do anything else as adults. The world is in rather a mess because of it. Student teachers are forever coming to me and saying, "Am I doing it right?" These students have something to learn from our children who explore, experience, and conclude without the deadening right-wrong red pencil hanging over them. And of course one of the less discussed but very important aspects of our school is the way in which the teachers and the children all develop in interaction with each other. (The whole atmosphere of the meeting changed at this point with Mrs. Kay's comment about the adults who can't think for themselves. There was an audible breathtake around the room, a nodding of heads, and thereafter a much freer spirit of inquiry.)

Q – Do you think this way of working works equally well for children of different backgrounds?

A – Yes. Because it depends not on educational standards, which are intellectual, but on child development, which is human. Obviously, there will be differences according to population. You must be clear in mind where each child is starting. You must look at him, at his use of materials, listen to the questions he asks you and asks himself, note the amount of internal discipline required in the tasks he chooses. The level of development will vary according to background and experience, but the stages of development are the same for everyone.

A Day With Simon

I chose Simon for a day-long observation because he is brand new to the class, socially and conceptually immature, and showed us from the moment he arrived that he had the potential for a real troublemaker. He could therefore be a great example of the before and after variety if indeed I get back for another look at him in the spring.

On his first day, there was some kind of fracas in the secretary's office before he ever reached the classroom. During that first day he hit several children, kicked a few more when he thought no one was looking, disrupted the Wendy house play from inside and out, and ended up in a fight with one of the older boys. The circumstances of the fight were interesting. He had been drawing a picture. When it was finished, the older boy drew a long pencil line right through it. At this Simon threw his paper to the floor with words and gestures to convey that it was ruined, and the fight began. When the two were separated, he came back to his drawing. I said that it was really all right despite the line, and he nodded and said, "Put it up (on the wall)." He didn't leave for the day until this was done.

A wonderful mischievous awareness accompanies his misdeeds. I found him one day trying to carry a kettleful of water to the Wendy house and stopped him, knowing full well how this would end. Two minutes later I saw him out of the corner of my eye making a second run for it and stopped him again. He gave me a broad "You've got me" grin and cheerfully emptied the kettle. In another vein, he surprised us a couple of days later when Trevor was sorting objects that roll from objects that slide. Trevor was distracted for a minute and put a roll object into the slide set. Simon corrected him.

Simon is five years, one month: he is the third child of seven. His mother arrived from Jamaica alone with the two older children when she was pregnant with him. The four younger children were fathered by one man who lives with the family in Council House quarters which are said to be above average for the area. An oral report from the school secretary says that the next older child, a girl, is sixteen and that Simon is spoiled by the present family because his younger siblings have a father in residence and he does not.

He came to us from another infant school. An anecdotal report from this school states that he was very disobedient but had been somewhat tamed by the school. He had no friends at the previous school and was alternately mothered and disciplined by the other children. Limited in vocabulary, he preferred to communicate by grunts and other noises, but could speak when pressed. He could count to ten. His attitude toward school was generally favorable. He tried hard and had good concentration. (He counts to four, not ten, but apart from this the report seems a fair estimate of the present situation.)

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The day: – 9:15 arrival. Comes aimlessly into the room and wanders. No person or activity particularly catches his eye. I am on the floor of the reading area with a girl who is showing me her word cards. Simon ambles over with a toy car and settles nearby; he makes loud car noises and moves the car along the rug. We pay no mind. Louder and louder car noises accompanied by bumps and jostling; I suggest that he move a little further away to give himself more room. He gets up, climbs on a nearby chair and teeters back and forth on the corrugated paper partition that separates us from the painting and project area. The painting children tell him to stop.

He doesn't stop right away, but a few minutes later he takes a table alone with a large paper portfolio entitled "Simon's Book." He draws a picture very intently for ten minutes or so. I go over to see it. The drawing is in pencil inside a large penciled square and the whole square is now crayoned over in many colors. He tells me it is a boy lying in bed, and here are the windows he can look out of. I asked him to show me the red in his picture and he does. He is leaning up against me while he tells me; he is calm and smiling. He is always calm if you sit by him and put your hand on him or around him. Show me the black, and he does. What is this color? He names it wrong. We were naming colors yesterday, but he still knows only black and red for sure. I tell him "yellow" and ask

him to show me some other things around the room that are yellow and he does. But when I go back to his picture again and ask him what color this part is, still yellow, he doesn't know. This is going to take a long time. He adds a few more colors around the edges, long vigorous strokes without comment from either of us, then gets up and puts the book away on the right shelf. I move on to another child.

Next he sits down again at the same table with a play school work bench. He picks up the hammer and bangs. He bangs and bangs, loud and louder. No notice is taken, and not because anyone is avoiding notice. The room is noisy at all times and a few more decibels really make no difference. Then he stops banging, and for a good long time, thirty minutes I'd guess, he concentrates on that bench. Screwing screws, bolting and unbolting with the wrench, disassembling and assembling all parts many times. I don't know if he or someone else put that away on the shelf. I assume he did, because the children don't tend to housekeep for others.

Then he leaves the room. I am aware of his absence, after a while I go looking for him. The children are allowed to wander in the corridor or in the big hall or to another class, but they are supposed to ask. There he is in the big hall, sipping on a bottle of milk. He takes his time over this, and of course it's fortunate that he can, that school philosophy allows him this freedom. Without it he wouldn't be able to contain himself and we would be at pains to contain him.

He reappears and heads for the sand tray. A girl is playing there with cups and bottles. He shoves her aside, she shoves back and tries to go on playing; he shoves harder, and she gives up and leaves. He throws all the sand toys except a baking pan on the floor, and a good deal of sand goes with them. I appear with dustpan and brush. "There is a good deal of sand on the floor, Simon. Would you please sweep it up?" He does, then he holds the baking pan on either side of one end and pushes the other end back and forth across the bottom of the tray. It is a strong scrubbing motion not unlike his handling of a crayon; it also makes a grand grating noise and creates different sand patterns with each scrub.

An idea goes through him. He stops, looks around to see if anyone is watching, then takes the baking pan over to the sink and gets a little bit of water, just a little bit. Still watching warily around the room he glides back to the sand tray, pours it in and goes on scrubbing.

Today is dental inspection day, so Adele and I gather a group to go upstairs, and Simon falls in at the end of the line. He bounds up the stairs. There is a window at each landing. At each window he jumps up and down to see out, saying "Shh, Shh" with each bounce. He enters the dentist's room and looks all around: the nurse seats him on a chair; he watches those ahead of him attentively. When the dentist speaks to him, he beams all over. She points out that he has his shoes on the wrong feet; he wiggles his toes with pleasure and beams some more. He is ushered out, but two minutes later he is back in again, just watching the others. Many of the children receive notes to take to their parents advising a visit to the dentist. Simon doesn't know what the notes are about, only that he didn't get one, so he tries to snitch one from a little girl. She sets up a howl, he grins, she gets it back. Down the stairs again, running and bouncing, and it's time to go out in the yard. He dashes out and runs the full length. You are not supposed to go into the nursery yard across the playground, but he does, runs all around the nursery and reappears. Then he stops still. There are a number of single children playing about and three distinct groups, one marching with arms linked and cheering something about football, one playing tag, and one playing football. Simon stands still until one of these comes close, then he comes alive and does what that group is doing. They pass him. He stands still. Another group comes into range and he imitates them, then is still again. The first group runs back, and he joins them. My impression is of an inert figure suddenly caught by stimulus, let drop into inertia, and then stimulated again by whatever comes near. Then he chooses, and joins the football playing. He is well-coordinated, runs and kicks well; he really plays the game, kicking back and forth, taking turns. One of his playmates is the boy he fought with on the first day.

* * *

Lunch: – He can scarcely sit in the chair. He eats quickly, holding his fork in a fist position, then bangs the fork and spoon incessantly on the table. He explores a crack between tables with the spoon. He leans all the way across his neighbor to steal a bite from the next plate. The dessert is brought to the table just as Adele leaves for a minute to turn in her dinner plate. It is jello with little blobs of whipped cream on each square. You can just see Simon's thought as his spoon moves toward the serving dish and the nearest little white blob. Adele returns and says, "Everyone will have to sit in his chair to get dessert." He falls back, plunk. He eats his dessert in a few quick bites. After lunch,

the children play again in the yard, supervised by the dining room ladies so that there is three-quarters of an hour of unsurveyed time.

1:15 P.M.: – Back in the classroom he comes like a tornado – swings on the Wendy house door, barges in – is told by the occupying children to get out because only four are allowed at one time, and four are there. He climbs on a chair, rocks it, and spits at them, not angry, just on the prod.

Another child is playing with the workbench. He walks over, pushes up against her and tries to pull it away. She pulls back. He pulls again and almost has it. "Stop him, Miss," she calls out, and I do.

He leads me back to the shelf where Simon's book is lying. He takes it out, we sit at a table, and this time he draws for me, talking while he does it. He draws a football field and four players with heads and legs only. The heads have bug eyes, a line nose, and a line mouth; then he makes the ball which he colors red, while he says *red.* "This is where the ball goes," he says, picking up the crayons, and now the whole picture is covered over with multi-colored strokes. I ask fewer questions this time, but he says *red, black,* and *orange* while he holds those colors. I write *Simon* near the bottom of the page, and he copies underneath, first the I, then the O, then the M and N, finally the S from the bottom up. He says, "I'll do a bus." The bus looks like a daschund, long and low, with two little wheels at either end – "the people," he says and adds the upper deck and two figures – the driver, a tiny figure up front. The bus goes over a rock, a large rock shape drawn under the bus body, scrubbed over plentifully in black; then two curious shapes protruding from the rock. "What are those, Simon?" "Feet." More crayoning. We start on a walk around the room finding all the red things we can, and it's 2:00 P.M. Early closing today because of a teachers' meeting. He leaves.

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A sifting of the day's observation of Simon yields the following conclusions:

- Simon is socially uninhibited and undisciplined – the impulse is the act, without regard for any but himself.
- He has no frustration tolerance. He wants what he wants when he wants it. Obstacles will be battered down by force.

- He is friendly and responsive and amenable to suggestion. His attitude toward himself, his peers, the teaching staff, and the opportunities in the classroom is generally positive. This is a huge plus. He is probably not attacking the environment out of any hostility toward it, but developmentally, in the manner of a much younger highly energetic child.
- His curiosity and energy levels are boundless.
- His language and conceptual ability are very limited. This again is probably a developmental matter. His present frame of reference is the concrete here and now. Every experience in doing, thinking, and concluding will be new for him.
- He requires taming and training and the postulated "rich variety of experience" in a kindly organized setting. I suspect that he will prosper.

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Letter from London, March 25, 1971: – "Incidentally, Simon is absolutely fantastic now, producing imaginative models and a continuous stream of original ideas."

Difficult Children

PROBLEM children are always a problem. This school has its share of the disruptive and the emotionally disturbed and seems to have absorbed them at least as well as other schools, and perhaps better.

Problem children of the aggressive variety are noisy and antagonistic. The more they are confined, the more the pressure builds up in them to an outburst. Simon is an example. He treats us daily to his noise and physical intrusion. In a quiet desk-seated classroom, he would be difficult indeed. In this set-up we can scarcely identify his noise above the rest. After the spell passes, he settles down. Sometimes he gets too rough, and we physically restrain him. Sometimes he releases energy by leaving the room, which he can do, and returns after exploring the corridor or the large hall. He does no damage on these excursions, and returns in a more peaceful mood. As the classrooms work increasingly in pairs, Simon's demands can be shared among the several teachers, assistants, and students involved.

We also have frightened, withdrawn children for whom freedom of movement is no answer. Mrs. Kay's office is a haven for these, and they know it. Motherless William, spindly as a little scarecrow, spends a lot of time there, playing quietly on the rug or looking at a book. His room teacher has arranged an individual corner for him in his homeroom, his "office" where he works and sorts out papers diligently; but when he needs more privacy he arrives at the Head's office, by himself or on his teacher's suggestion, and gains security from the visits.

Krishna is perhaps our most extreme problem. An extra teacher has always been provided for her classroom to meet the strain she places upon it. When she first came to school a year and some ago, nothing was safe in her hands. She swept paint pots to the floor,

kicked and bit the other children, threw salt and flour all around, and generally laid waste to her surroundings. She came for only two half-days a week at first, and it was so difficult to contain her for even these two periods of time that the teacher always took the whole group to the park for one of them. The teacher also enlisted the cooperation of the other children. She talked to them one morning, early on, before Krishna arrived for the day, and again on other mornings as it seemed necessary. She told them that Krishna was difficult because she was unhappy, and asked for their help in making her school adjustment a success. She firmly believes that without their continuing compassion and support, the adjustment could not have been made.

For nearly half a term, this teacher disentangled Krishna from her fights with children and equipment, picked up after her, and said not one restraining word. Then one day she decided, though she says that it was not her decision really, but a sensitive tacit understanding between the two of them, that enough was enough. From that day on, when she saw Krishna simmering, she simply withdrew her either from the troublesome activity or from the classroom, and the two sat quietly together until Krishna felt she could return.

Her first class interest was cooking. For a long period she cooked every day and washed up for everyone – the one thing she had learned to do perfectly from her home background. Now a year and a quarter later, she has sampled all the activities. Her representational painting is just beginning to be recognizable. She is showing an interest in reading and is perhaps ready to begin. Socially, she first learned self-control in her own classroom, but was unmanageable away from it. Though she is still prickly and unpredictable, she now handles herself better all around the school.

Krishna is obviously intelligent, and old enough to be in the Juniors, although unready in every way to be there. There is no psychiatric help available for her, although she has been interviewed, and the need is recognized by all. The clear accomplishment of the school, the children, and particularly the room teacher is that they have held open a path through which a wild and miserable creature could become a human being.

I mentioned above that the successful class management of Krishna required the continual presence of two teachers. It might be useful here to describe the distribution of staff throughout the rest of the school and the various functions of staff in the

classroom. We were rare and fortunate among London schools to have two people in almost every room, of whom one was the teacher in charge and the source of authority, and the second, varying in seniority from equal (in Krishna's room) to beginner or student, was the assistant. Visits were welcomed from the music teacher, who sewed with the children one afternoon a week, and from one of the dinner ladies, who popped in from time to time to read stories; but the year-long responsibility for the class falls to the charge teacher.

Basically, the two major functions at work all day in the room are the positive intervention – the teaching function – and just plain housekeeping, with the discipline and interpersonal relationships woven into the fabric of both. There's no more glue. Somebody has to get down the powder and mix it. Three children want purple construction paper books in the shape of an egg. Someone has to prepare and staple these, so the children can get on with their project. In our room, Adele and I took turns, according to circumstance, at the two functions, and the advantage of two was of course partly dictated by the spontaneous quality of events. One could foresee a shortage of glue, but one could not foresee the need for purple egg-shaped books. The authority role of the charge teacher may or may not raise a problem. In the family group system, the teacher in charge is the children's prime source of identification for three years and it is to him or to her that the children turn in case of great need – injury, misery, arbitration. In our room, I observed that when I left, everything remained normal, if a bit more hectic. But if Adele left, the balance of control shifted at once. Most of the children went on about business as usual, but there were always two or three – and the same two or three, Paul, Robert, and Diane – who would drop everything and turn to testing my authority. I then had the task of meeting their test and keeping the hum going among the rest, and my tactics varied with the instance. The resolution of this problem depends, I should think, on the understood permanence of the assistant and her growing personal relationship with each child.

Family Grouping and Child- Versus Teacher-initiated Activity

FAMILY grouping was not a feature of this school to begin with. Fives, Sixes, and Sevens were in separate rooms. The present grouping evolved gradually because the children's freedom to move from one classroom to another, with permission, led them to move where they felt most at home, that is, in the company of a younger or older sibling, relative, or friend. Because of the large family groups in the school, this drift was more striking than it might be in a population of smaller families. The staff noticed it, and some classrooms were regrouped last year, the rest this year.

Some advantages of these were:

1. The success of the school day depends on an understood organization and orderliness that doesn't always show. Children must learn to put one thing away in its place before going on to another; to clean up whatever mess they make; to limit the number of children who can engage in certain activities at one time; to respect the concentration and the product of another's work. Children who have been in the school a year or two know these things. New children, either Fives or from another school, do not. The assimilation process is much smoother if there is a body of responsible citizens to absorb the newcomers, and the newcomers learn faster from a surrounding of peers than from one or two teachers.

2. Learning occurs as much from peers as from other sources. It is an advantage to the younger ones to watch and help their slightly elders who are engaged in activities that they will soon come to. It is an advantage to the older ones to be able to work with the little ones because it helps them to consolidate what they know.

3. There is a reduction of achievement anxiety. In a formal class setting material is introduced which is thought suitable to the needs of that class. There are general hoped-for aims for each grade, but everyone knows that children progress at different rates, so different reading and math schemes and workbooks are provided for practice at different levels of difficulty. Two inescapable features of this situation are (a) that the children know the order of progression as well as the teacher – they know perfectly well whether they are in the top reading or math group or the lowest, and (b) that they feel a responsibility for making gains whether they can manage to or not.

In the family-grouped open classroom nobody feels that weight of responsibility. The age and ability spread is wide; there are many, many books at all levels in the room, but no graded schemes; and each child has plenty of opportunity to observe and familiarize himself with a new task, or a new level of an old task, without any loss of confidence. He takes from each experience what he is ready for, without comparison to any but himself – an educational goal aimed at by many and achieved by few.

The chief disadvantage of family grouping is that to some extent it deprives children of each age group of activities and experiences specially suitable to them. It is impossible to find many stories, for instance, which are really right for a range of low four to high seven. Supporters of family grouping quite properly point out that story and other listening activities shouldn't happen often in a full class setting anyway, but there are other problems.

A group of Sevens went on an excursion for a morning last week. The remaining teacher was struck by the attitude and activity change in the younger children. Freed from the dominance of their elders and their simple appropriation of classroom equipment, the younger ones worked seriously and hard all morning in a most unusual way. This teacher would do away with family grouping tomorrow on the ground that it discriminates against the younger ones.

Another problem which also points, in the eyes of some, toward discrimination against the younger children arises from a question frequently raised at interschool meetings. "Do you pay any special attention to the Sevens to ready them for the formal junior school?" Our Head's stock reply to this is, "I don't believe in starving a child now because he may have to go hungry later," by which she means: Let's not vitiate a strong program to meet the

expedient demands of another type of school. Practically speaking, however, this is not quite the way it works. One teacher put it this way: "You don't make any more of an effort about the skills of Sevens than you made when they were Fives and Sixes, because that would deny the essence of the free-choice system, and we hope they've been progressing right along. Remember, also, that we have no achievement standards for the children. We never promise to send a child up reading or computing or whatever. Our responsibility is to receive him at his own level, and to develop him as far as we can during the infant years. At the same time, you always have many different things ticking in your head about any given child. And if he's a Seven and one of those ticks says more reading practice or more number work, you do indeed try to see that practice opportunities are put in his way. It's a subtle thing, but you obviously have it in mind, and there may be times when you pay less attention to the younger ones because of it."

* * *

The whole question of child- versus teacher-initiated activity deserves mention at this point. It is my understanding, though not my experience, that when you begin work in the open classroom with a whole new untrained group of children, you do it in a very formal, organized way. First, you give the children a complete tour of the room, pointing out every item of equipment, and then you systematically assign each child to a task with the instruction that he go to it, get it out, use it, play with it, or whatever, and that he return it to place and report back to you when he is finished. You then assign him to another activity, and the purposes here are two: to familiarize him with a variety of activities which he might otherwise not sample for a needlessly long period, and to set, at the beginning, the pattern for work method. It seems that most children gradually assume the initiative in task assignment, asking for certain activities, and as they do so, you let them take over.

Ours is not a beginning classroom. A number of its members are in their third year and very competent in their choices and their work habits. A few, however, are not.

At the beginning of the year, the nonparticipant in our room is allowed to drift a bit at will, to see if he'll settle down to something of his own accord or in imitation of someone else. If he doesn't, you begin watching very closely to see what children and what activities attract his attention. And then you move in with,

"Do you want to do what Emily's doing?" "Do you want to join Colin at the sand table?" You hope he will say yes, and you then hover nearby to see that he is participating or doing his own thing, encouraging him if he lags. Both starting and finishing, at the beginning, turn out to depend a good deal on the amount of attention you pay to the activity. You want the child to become task-oriented and internally disciplined, but you may have to feed in a lot of encouragement before this happens.

If the child refuses your suggestions, your next task is to set aside time to just be with him and talk to him and get him talking to you about anything at all. From your conversation you pick up clues about his interests, and you listen for the mention of any topic – football, cars, animals – anything that you can tie to a game or a scrap book or a tape recorder, and when he accomplishes the smallest accomplishment, you commend it.

Nonparticipants seem to fall basically into two categories, the compliant and the resistant. Compliant drifters need to be told to paint a picture, cajoled into a game, or thrust into a pot of Play-Do until they get acclimatized and know for themselves which activites they like better than others. Hostile drifters have to establish a personal relationship before they will do a thing, and it seems to work to respect their hostility and let them drift while you get to know them. As you become friends, the hostility disappears. The whole class atmosphere is on your side during this struggle – it's hard to hold out when everyone else is having a noisy fun time.

Simon is a case in point here. Even in the few weeks that I knew him, he was beginning to settle down. He bothered the other children less as he became absorbed in his own interests. Shortly before I left he was engrossed in a burst of model making, and one of my last memories of him is his proudly showing me a sailing ship he had made from a shoe box, and counting off the sails, one, two, three, four. The effort and concentration required to locate the pieces, and to assemble and stick them together, was a clear indication of personal growth.

Intervention and Nonintervention

THE jargon phrase for the teacher's daily role in the classroom is "positive intervention" and the theory is that you intervene when you see the opportunity to extend the language or the understanding of the activity under way. At the start, I didn't know when or how, so I let a lot of opportunities go by. Then I seemed to catch on and intervened a great deal. By the end I had backed off again, having perceived the obvious further refinement – that there are times to intervene and times to let well enough alone, and the question is, how do you decide?

This is where knowing your child is so important, and an advantage of family grouping is that you know him better if you work together for three years than you do if you work with him for only one. Danny can be led to an activity; Paul would rather not. Trevor indicates an interest in something by fiddling tentatively with it, and twinkling at you out of the corner of his eye. He would like you to notice and get him started.

A lot of what happens in our room is self-satisfying – the experience is the learning. We made squeezy paint in four colors yesterday. It's made of paint powder, lots of flour, and some water, very thick, and poured by funnel into small-aperture plastic detergent bottles. I had never made it before and had several eager helpers. We all discussed the process thoroughly, and I think, profitably – the ingredients, the proportions, what made it thicker and thinner, what other liquids were like this, the function of the funnel, and how curious it was that you could stir and stir and still find pockets of dry flour in the mix. Why?

When it was ready, the children could hardly wait to get at it. What you do is squeeze it out on the paper in thick globs and then tip the paper till it all runs together, fold the paper over for a squishy symmetry, or get into it with both hands and push it all around. Apart from asking what happened to bright red, green, blue, and violet when they all got mixed up, there was simply nothing to add to the sheer visual and tactile enjoyment of the experience. A lot of early sand, water, construction, and weighing work is like this. Better to admire and say little.

On the other hand, Trevor, this morning, was interested in a stopclock. First he pushed the start-stop and the back-to-zero levers randomly. Adele noticed him and asked him what the levers did and how he might use them. "You could see how long something took," he said, and looked around the room for something to time. Before the morning was out, he and some friends were timing the passage of sand through one hole bored in a plastic bottle, then two holes, then different amounts of sand, and Adele was setting problems and asking many questions.

The same discrimination is necessary in recording what happens. Sometimes the experience is sufficient, sometimes not. Some children decided to measure the length of their teacher in horsechestnuts. They made a long long line of them on the floor, and he obligingly lay down beside them, but in such a way that the last horse chestnut was even with his ankle. It is a characteristic of this teacher that he sets as many challenges nonverbally as aloud. He will give children thread too large for their needles, or needles too fat for their material, and watch to see what they do about it. In this instance, a couple of children started off counting, and a third said, "Stop. That won't do." And he said "Why not?" and the child said, "Because you have to move up." So he did, till the last horsechestnut was a foot below his heel. The first two children still didn't understand, and would have counted again, but the third child said that wouldn't do either, that he had to move down even with the last chestnut. He did. And the count was made. It doesn't matter at all how many there were. The first two children got a total, plus a glimmering of the fact that there was something more to know about this, and the third child confirmed his knowledge of a concept. Recording was unnecessary.

Conversely, it is difficult to sort for blue eyes and brown within the class without keeping count, and a scientific method must be observed if any learning is to occur.

There are, of course, many ways of recording a sorting. I talked to several children from another room one afternoon who were haphazardly sorting they knew not what or why to get some kind of result on a bar graph. Adele and I agreed afterward that they hadn't a clue to what they were doing, and she mentioned the danger of falling into a pseudo-scientific method in which the children slap a bunch of sticky paper pieces on the rising bar graph, and nobody but the teacher has any idea what it's all about. Later still, the teacher in the next room described how he would explore an eye-color sorting in terms of a bar graph. First, he said, you have to keep two things distinct – the information and its representation on the graph. A good way to do this is to involve the children bodily in the experience on the first try. They could sort themselves into two groups in the room according to the color of their eyes and count themselves. They would then know that there were nineteen blues, let's say, and thirteen browns, more blues than browns, and some would know how many more. At that point, you could have each one cut himself a sticky square and ask how he would put the squares on a paper to show how many browns and blues there were among them. Some would figure this out, some would appreciate the solution when it was demonstrated, and some might only realize that a solution was possible without understanding it; but they would all know that each piece of paper stood for one of them, a fundamental principle of pictorial representation.

The distinction between the information and its representation comes up at different levels of subtlety. Consider the measuring of foot length. In the simplest illustration, a child can make a paper template of his own foot, paste it on a piece of paper, and say, "That's my foot." If he makes similar templates of other feet, he can compare lengths. More abstractly, he can stand on a sticky paper strip and make a mark at heel and toe. The strip does not look like his foot, but stands for the same length. Nearly everyone in the class can understand this. In a third stage, the child measures his foot in a shoe store gadget, cuts the sticky strip to fit and puts *that* on the recording paper. The representation is now two steps removed from the actual foot. This abstraction is much easier for the teacher than for the child, and the teacher must scrupulously guard against reading in his own understanding. As one teacher says, "You have to know what's happening and what you're doing in that class every single minute."

Several tenets, basic to this whole way of working, are implicit in the foregoing description – the nature of the participating

group, of the methods used, and of the results gained. It is perhaps unorthodox to suggest that the whole class would participate simultaneously in one activity. Usually it wouldn't happen. And it absolutely shouldn't happen as a routine. But it could happen if a spontaneous interest in eye sorting occurred in a large part of the group at one time. I've seen kite-making and relief-rubbing occur in this way – erupt would be a better word. Suddenly everyone wants to get in on the same activity. The one principle common to all the activities and groupings of this class is that they are defensible if they answer to a thoughtful WHY.

As to method, it is frequently thought that in this kind of classroom a child is placed in random contact with a whole lot of materials and left to shift for himself. It is not so. The choice of the task lies with the child, or with child and teacher jointly, but once the choice is made, the discipline of the task is there for him quite as much in this classroom as in any other. Typically, in an example like the one above, some child would come back to you within a few days and say he wanted to sort out socks now, and would you help? Your help would consist in standing by while he thought about the problem and tried to arrive at a satisfactory solution. His solution might or might not be the same as that of the earlier day. That is, the understanding of the process would be the same, but he could describe it in any clear way he chose, and you certainly would not push for the repetition of a bar graph as in the repetition of like sums in a math workbook. You wouldn't interfere if he seemed competent, and you'd be able to decide about competency, not only from his actions, but also because the children tend to tell you what they're doing even if you don't ask. He might well run into the trouble of leaving somebody out, or not having enough color categories, or confusing his tallies, and you would of course talk about this until it was straightened out. It would be irresponsible to do otherwise. In sum, the discipline of freedom is as much a part of an informal self-directed task as any other and may be more solidly absorbed just because of that self-direction.

It is very difficult to discuss results clearly because it is on this point that the aims of this school and those of conventional schools as we know them most widely diverge. Most schools judge the results of teaching with achievement tests, standard or local. This school refuses to give them. Most schools say, "We want to know where the children are." This school says, "We want to know how far the children have grown over a broad range of abilities and no achievement test will tell us." Most schools want

their children to acquire certain knowledge. This school wants its children to acquire a set of tools for exploring questions and solving problems, with certain knowledge accruing as attribute.

Therefore, the optimum result of this experiment in sorting is that a child should have stated his question, investigated it in an orderly way, arrived at a conclusion, and seen that the process might be applicable to the solution of other questions. The issue is somewhat confused by the fact that the activity cited was one in which the whole class participated. It would not be realistic to expect the optimum result of every participant from age four to seven. So one must add to the definition of optimum result that each should have participated in the activity to the level of his capability at that time.

An October Day

WHEN school began – it doesn't begin with a bell or any formal notice; children just drift in and by 9:15 they're mostly there – I was chatting with several children. Antonia wanted admiration for a new pair of socks; Kim was wearing a new jumper; Chris was back in school after Friday's absence, none too pleased about the four new stitches in his upper lip. He is only just healing from the last set.

Kim and Antonia ask to read to me. Kim is not reading at all. There are several *I Can* books in the classroom. *I Can Fly* is one, *I Can Swim, I Can Jump, I Can Climb.* The format is the same on each page but one, only the picture changes, so the child can easily learn the format and shift the sentence to fit each picture in turn. On one page the sentence words are in a different order. Kim sails right by, and doesn't notice at all. She's just reciting, but it gives her pleasure and confidence to do so, and takes her a step closer to real reading when she's ready. We go through her three or four word cards. She guesses inaccurately at the words and doesn't want to write any.

Antonia reads a book from the same series to me while Kim listens. Antonia knows the words, reads them, and sees the sentence-switch. She shows me her word cards, tells me what they are, and goes off to draw a picture. Tracey reads still another to me, but like Kim, she is really reciting it. Each of these three is equally satisfied with her performance, as indeed am I. I have noticed differences, but each has done what she could fairly do.

Robert is hanging around, undecided. I ask if he would like to paint, and he says, "Yes." His picture is absolutely marvelous, and before the day is out, Adele is having a mock battle with Mrs. Kay about whether we're going to put it up in our room or she's going

to get it for the hall. The compromise. It's on our door, facing the hall.

The picture is of a pair of lorries, produced over a period of twenty minutes or so. Each lorry is outlined in one color. The cab and trailer are then separately outlined, each in a different color, within the first line; still different colors are used for the seat, wheels, and steering mechanism. Robert paints all of this upside down – wheels to the top of the paper, turns it right side up, and says, "There – lorries." In my view, this child, nearing five, has the most mature sense of color, balance, and design of anyone in the room, but unique as he is, the overall school output is impressive. The infant art inspector came to visit one day recently, and he said that in terms of media, imagination, and execution, this was the most creative infant school exhibition he'd ever seen.

Remembering my own recent art photography tour around the school, I was sure that some of the highlights of his visit must have included the following:

- intricate fine-line pencil drawings evoked by a story about a battle with a dragon
- a wall hanging made of a number of apple cartons stapled together against a gold paper mounting sheet, the apple depressions in each box painted a different color
- the Billy Goat Gruff wall mural, the goats and troll made of tissue-covered newspaper, stapled to a brightly colored painting of green grass, bridge, flowers, water, and sky
- ink pictures made by blowing different colors of ink onto paper through short lengths of drinking straw
- the honeycomb. Short sections of cardboard tubing of different diameters, cut and mounted side by side, a few of them stuffed with bright paper or material
- models – squeeze bottle men, corrugated paper animals, buildings and battleships, the fabulous parachute – a cottage cheese carton connected by string to an orange balloon, complete with tissue paper balloonist – tissue paper witches flying on straw and raffia brooms
- gummed paper designs in various geometrical shapes and colors
- picture collage – photographs cut and pasted in a jumble over one another

- print pictures – printing of sponges, cotton reels, blocks, cookie cutters, etc., in various colors
- symmetry-by-folding pictures in regular and heavy paint
- symmetry-by-cutting pictures, mounted on construction paper
- the undersea mural with some painted and some modeled sea creatures
- Stephen's goat family. The baby goat in black and white was easiest to photograph. Mother and Father in red on red and blue on blue were long and thin and completely arresting
- life-size paper dolls of specific children, traced, cut, clothed and colored and mounted in a row on the wall
- innumerable representational and abstract paintings.

(There is no art teacher in the school.)

Linda and Wendy are seated at a desk together. In front of them is a long strip of construction paper, folded into six equal sections. In the middle of each section is pasted one cartoon picture from a sequence of six. Choosing from their word cards, these two girls are writing their own story for this sequence underneath the pictures. I supply them with a couple of words. Diane is annoying them, banging a magnet on their table. I suggest to Diane that we take a basket and walk around the room looking for things her magnet will pick up. We do. We gather a fine collection of things it will and some things it won't, and I offer my wedding ring and my family ring for trial also. She wants to draw a picture showing the different categories, so she makes two large circles on a paper, sorts the objects into the two circles and starts drawing.

Linda and Wendy come over, giggling, and ask does this word say "Chris"? It does. Then more giggling and they ask for "kissing" and go back to their cartoon. Diane comes to the English penny. She slides it under the paper and makes a rubbing of it. We talk about the magnet. She says it picks up metal, but not all metal. Not my gold ring, not my silver ring, and not that penny. The picture is finished. She takes it over to show Adele, who asks her to describe what she's been doing, but she won't. Diane is often like this. She's an enthusiastic member of a group, and can also work unselfconsciously at a problem by herself, but she gets nervous if you ask her to sum things up out loud at the end.

I ask Diane if she can see anything else in the room that will make a rubbing like the penny, and she picks up a pencil and another paper and starts looking. She finds an embossed tray bottom, the lid of the trash can, and some corrugated paper roll. Then Simon comes up with the tray bottom rubbed in blue crayon. Diane drops paper and pencil and heads for a pink crayon. Several other children become interested and start looking round the room. They do a peg board, tiles in the hall, a rough shelf top, a bookcase backing, and they try sand but it doesn't work. They bring the rubbings to me and ask me to label them, and some go back to what they were doing before, others go looking for more things to rub.

Tea and coffee arrive in the room by tray for the teachers. There is no coffee break, in order that the activity of the room shall continue unbroken and fully staffed until noon. It comes again in the afternoon. The children are given milk in the hall about 10:30.

Antonia brings me her own book. I have mentioned these books before, and they are really popular. They are regular published books with good illustrations but stupid text, with taped photocorners on either side of the text and cut oaktag pieces to fit. The child looks through the pictures in the book and dictates or writes his own story. There are so many of these now that we keep a special basket for them alone, so that everyone knows where to look. They may be read several times a day, and the only problem with them is that we thought we would use them over and over for different children with fresh oaktag, but the first owners don't want to give up or exchange for others so far. Antonia reads hers to me.

Another example of self-made books is the draw-your-own variety, but this takes a lot more time and effort, and only the more mature children do them at all regularly. We also have blank books with a cover photograph of a child or children. Instead of telling a made-up story, the children write about themselves, and the reading practice tends to be better if two children write the book together, because they usually want to say similar things about themselves, and you get a repetition of useful reading and writing vocabulary without contriving it.

Robert: I am big.
Mark: I am big.
Robert: I have a big sister.
Mark: I have a little sister, etc.

Like anything else in the room, however, these little books, particularly the photo-corner ones, can be misused for non-learning. Some children want to dictate a huge tome, from their speaking, but not their reading, vocabulary. The language experience of the oral storyteller of this type is better suited to the tape recorder. The little books are most useful when they reflect the child's working vocabulary, plus such extra unknown words as are necessary to fill out the meaning.

Tracey and Kim ask me to be with them while they play Animal Lotto. They get their cards filled. Then I ask them successively to take away the picture of an animal with a long neck, one with a thick skin and no fur, one that lives in the water, one that kills other animals for its food, etc., until I get all the cards off again by attribute.

Brad, the teacher in the next room, asks me to come see the ten-place sorting box he made over the weekend. It has ten compartments and many uses, of which sorting is only one. Children this morning put in objects of ten different colors, one to a compartment, and then looked for other items to go with those ten. When I was there, a child was putting one counter and one plastic triangle in one box, two counters and two plastic triangles in the next, etc. Sometimes Brad puts the same number of counters into each compartment, say, five, and the children, drawing a number card from a face-down pack ranging from one to six, have to add or take away counters until the counters and their number cards match.

One child perceived the odd-even progression of numbers in this box. Brad handed him two counters and told him to put the same number into each of two spaces. He did. Then Brad gave him three. And the boy said, "One here, one here, and one left over." Given four counters, the boy put two into each of the two spaces. With five counters, he again had one left over. Given six counters, he put three each into the two spaces. Given seven counters, he said "I'm going to have one left over with every other number. How do you say that?" And only then did Brad supply the words "odd" and "even."

Brad is full of ideas and challenges for the children, and sometimes he feels that his very involvement hinders progress. I have heard him say at the end of a trying day, "The trouble was, I didn't really listen to them. I had this great idea and I didn't hear what *they* were saying." Brad is in no danger of overriding his children. His awareness precludes the possibility, but his comments underline still another of the sensitive discriminations

involved in this way of working. Yes, you should have ideas and imaginative suggestions, and homemade sorting boxes and games to play with them, but at the same time, if you put out a suggestion and it falls flat, you leave it; and if the children make an unforeseen use of it, you have to be flexible and not push for your own. Any teacher who is responsive to his students knows this, but in a self-directed system, with no advance planning, the responsibility falls even more upon the teacher to decide on the spot whether to push or to lay off.

The homemade box and the seashell - navy bean type of inventory of math materials is representative of the down-to-earth everyday quality of most of the school equipment. Brad can make do with this cheerfully most of the time, "But if I could have one piece of store-bought equipment," he says, "I'd buy the Dienes Logiblocks. There are so many times in math when you suddenly want objects of a number of different attributes right at hand, right away, to show or ask something, and by the time you've gathered the rough equivalents from the stuff we have all around this room, the moment is past."

I went on an errand at this point, and missed the end of the morning, which probably included a run in the playground and a story before lunch. Lunch break is the only time when classroom activity is suspended and everyone leaves the room. The children eat at noon and play outside until 1:15. The teachers eat with the children, and then either convene in the staff room by choice or for a special meeting, or use the time elsewhere in their own way.

In the afternoon, Kim wanted to do the magnet trip, so I walked around with her and gathered up different things. When Diane came to confirm her earlier findings by supervising Kim, she found she had to think about the sorting again because we hadn't chosen the same objects. Kim said "silver" several times instead of metal, because all of the attracted objects were in fact silvery. She eventually said the right word, but had forgotten it by the end of the afternoon. Diane remembered easily that magnets attracted some but not all metals, and repeated the word iron several times, which she also has by no means learned. Mental reminder – go over this again when the opportunity arises.

Danny is wandering without purpose nearby. He has only recently come to us from the nursery, where they found him to be of rather mercurial temperament. Sometimes he joined in activities, sometimes he poked and teased around them and the other children. And he was occasionally given to such uncontrollable rage that the teachers found it best to remove his shoes for safety from

flailing feet. A couple of days ago, he admired Robert's counting book and wanted to do one himself, but he can concentrate on only a page or two per day, particularly as the numbers get higher. He chooses a subject for each page – people, houses, fish, or whatever – and draws as many of them as the page title requires.

"Would you like to work on the counting book, Danny?" A nodded yes. "Then bring it over and we'll start. Let's hear you count what we have already." "One house, two people, three cars." "What's the next number going to be?" "Four. I'll make four crayons."

I pick up a handful of crayons and hold them out to him, and he counts off four and draws them on the page, telling me what color he will make each one. Laying the four crayons on the table, we name different ways of making four. Then we play a find-four game where I put too many or too few crayons in front of us and he brings the number back to four.

"What's next?" "Five. Let's do airplanes."

There's a small plastic airplane in a basket on the table, and he traces off five of them, checking the count after each one because in the time it takes to trace he's forgotten where he was. And I end up holding the airplane in place because otherwise it moves in mid-trace, and he doesn't like the look of it. More counting games, and then he's had enough for one session.

Something for the reader to remember during this account is how long each activity actually takes. It takes no time at all to say that Danny traced five airplanes, or Diane drew the magnetized objects, or Kim read me her book. Each of these activities actually represented a long time, and a lot of unrecorded quiet conversation.

Now the rubbing interest emerges again. Two children this time, Jillian with Diane. They find a way to rub the sand granules. "It won't work when they're all in a lump. Push them out." Then we go outside, and there find a utility cover in the pavement with a great relief design. So, back to the room for a brush, some fresh paper, crayons, and tape. The two girls rub the cover slowly in a number of colors, being careful not to rip the paper, sharing crayons and areas of the cover, taking turns doing the lettering, and the whole thing turns out beautifully. And I ask them, then, "Can you rub any surface and get a pattern?" and Diane says scornfully, "NO, of course not. Part of it has to be upper and part of it has to be downer. Then it will work." We have just time to show the rubbing to the class and to Adele and Mrs. Kay, and to everybody who happens to be along our route, before the day ends with 3:30 hometime.

Reflections

THE principal participants in the learning situation of the open classroom are the teachers and the children, and it would be hard to say, terminology notwithstanding, who learns more from whom. In any case, the first part of this chapter is about the teacher, and the second concerns the children.

I feel that a teacher (and I call her "she" only because I'm thinking about myself) needs to keep the following points in her own mind, in her own personal way, while she is working in the open classroom: rigor, control, antennae, philosophy.

Rigor embraces both the setting and the method. It is the bone structure of the learning process. Rigor demands, for instance, that over time and in continual renewal the teacher should study the physical properties of her classroom and ask herself if she and the children are making the best possible use of them. The boys are doing a lot of big block construction work in the reading area. Would it be advisable to rearrange the furniture after school to create a separate undisturbed place for them? There's a lot of talk in the Wendy House about injuries and visits to the hospital emergency room. How about making the Wendy House into a hospital?

In the matter of materials, she should make a tour herself, before a child ever enters the room, of every piece of equipment and ask herself, "How many things can I think of to do with this?" And if she doesn't know, she should find out. This doesn't mean a prerequisite college course in physics or advanced math. No matter how well prepared, the day will scarcely ever pass when a child won't ask her a question she can't answer on the spot, and joint research is very rewarding. But it does mean a basic

knowledge about the basic materials. This task falls hardest on the beginner, who is, of course, least competent to deal with it, but eventually it eases in two ways. The children teach her, through their questions, what she needs to find out about, and if there are other teachers in nearby classrooms with similar materials, she can learn with them. In fact, if several teachers are beginning this work at the same time, they can help each other from the start by pooling their joint information.

I have mentioned methodological rigor throughout this report, and it simply comes down to this: Given any task or activity, however chosen, the teacher must understand its nature and possibilities if she is to help the child to understand clearly what he is doing. If a child wants to cook, the teacher must be sure that he can measure his ingredients correctly and that he can follow sequential cooking steps toward a successful cupcake. If he wants to sort, she must be sure he knows what he's sorting and why his objects fall into their various categories. If he wants to read, she must know what book will be suitable and what preparation is necessary to make the experience a success. More than that, she must know where she is, in reference to this child, in her own sequential pattern of reading instruction.

Conceptual development is largely a matter of approximation through reduction of error, leading to a clear statement about something. Fitting the pieces together to a conclusion is hard enough for a child. If the teacher isn't clear herself about a process, she can't be of much help to the child in developing his own clarity. She has also to bear in mind the totality of the child's experience, personal and social, as well as conceptual, and be comfortable in her own mind that between the two of them he is meeting as high a level of challenge as his level of maturity allows.

"Discipline," as Sylvia Ashton-Warner has brilliantly put it, "is the art of getting attention when you want it." Notice the word "art." In most classrooms, teachers maintain control by imposition and rule of force – by rules, bells, schedules, groupings, and various forms of deprivation and punishment for the noncooperative. Many teachers feel, even when they're calling all the shots, that their control is shaky and that they might lose it at any moment.

A striking feature of the open classroom is the absence of the rule of force. Another striking feature is the near absence of the kind of problem that the rule of force is intended to contain. Consider the history of my school. Under the old system, with all

the rules and constraints that could be devised, the children were erupting all over the place. All their energies were addressed to fighting punitive authority. Under the new system, there is indeed authority, but it is not punitive. I would call it granted authority, and it rests with the teacher by virtue of her relationship with the children, which is a mix of mutual respect and affection, a sharing of responsibility, and the knowledge that together they can work to make the room a congenial, productive place for everyone. I've also heard it rather mystically described as an invisible emanation from the secure teacher. The children just sense that she knows what she's doing, and that she'll treat them humanly, so they let her be boss. There are a few rules, very few, and they all have exclusively to do with personal safety and consideration for others.

Many teachers, discussing the open classroom, find this control aspect very threatening and scary. They're just sure, from their own experience, that if they tried it, they'd have unrelieved chaos on their hands. Well, there's no halfway point. You either stand by your rules, or you stand by the conviction that children can learn to be considerate. But the point cannot be too strongly made that most of the threats disappear with the rules.

Sure, there will be the occasional Krishna, but she'd be a special case in any environment. And true, I was occasionally challenged by two or three children, but they were born challengers and I was a delightfully temporary target. If I had stayed, we would have worked this through. In the main, you get attention because you ask for it. You call a group together to do something in line with their interest, and they come willingly. You tell them it's time to clean up and can you have volunteers for the different areas, and volunteers appear. From their first day in school, they have been led, from the rigor department, to pick up after themselves and put things away. This is part of their responsibility, and they accept it as part of their freedom.

A full set of interpersonal antennae is the most valuable attribute a teacher can have. My set isn't tuned in right yet, but I understand its importance and believe it can be tuned in in time.

Consider the following sad illustration. One morning Trevor was measuring things with sticky paper strips. He was truly interested in comparative lengths, and mildly interested in inches. Not wildly, just mildly. I was with him, and I regret to report that I took that child from inches to feet to the yardstick, and practically all the way to the international standard of measurements, before he fled. The label for this crime is unpremeditated

imposition. If I had been attuned to him, I would have stopped a inches.

Antennae, as I have suggested, give you such valuable nuggets as:

- when to question and when to keep silent
- when a child understands what he's doing and when he's just muddling through
- when to introduce a new activity and when to let the child figure out something for himself
- how far to take a given activity already under way
- when a child would like your attention without having to come ask for it
- how to move in on a hostile or shy child without threatening him
- which of several activities just might intrigue the hostile or the shy
- how to make a new child feel comfortable
- when to reduce the enthusiasm and noise level of the children before they start climbing the walls.

Rigor and control are useless without antennae. The three working together make a quite reliable framework for daily practice in class. And then, to give long-term direction and focus, you add in philosophy, a few thoughts about what the point of it all is, and what you hope everyone is going to get out of it.

I am reminded, as I speak of philosophy, of a parent-teacher meeting at the school one evening. Mrs. Kay had been describing the program and illustrating her remarks with art and work papers from the various classrooms. At the question period, the Inevitable Question arose: "My kid likes school. 'E gets all messy with that art stuff, but why don't 'e do more sums like other children?"

I never hear this question any more without seeing in my mind's eye a test tube standing next to a *bell jar*. The test tube is full to the brim with sums and facts and reading vocabulary. The bell jar, wide and deep, is only partly full, but its whole volume is a fluid mosaic of different colors, separate, meeting, and st eaming together.

In another view, this mind picture represents to me the break between the education of the past and future. Not being an

educational philosopher, I make no pretense of validating my thoughts on that basis. But as a parent, a teacher, and a human being of some education and insight, it seems clear to me that for centuries, education has been based on the premise that the world was knowable, and that if you exposed the young to as much known information about the world as you could press into the classroom, they would be prepared to deal with a knowable world as adults.

The question of what was worth knowing, furthermore, has always been rather narrowly defined by the educators, and since in every culture, education begins with the economically established and socially élite, who have the time for it, the content applicability to an increasingly broadening population base has always produced confusing, sometimes heartbreaking, results. Latin for the miner, unless he chooses it? Foreign geography for the child who has never been off his own block? Roman numerals for the Ontario second grades? Dick and Jane in the urban slum? Behaviorally, also, there has been a none-too-subtle thread running through the whole educational fabric to say that children are, or should be, miniature adults: that certain behavior, decided upon by the elders, is desirable, and that other, or different, behavior is undesirable and should be curbed and extinguished. This may have its source in an historical conviction that education was a serious means-to-an-end job. Its end, like its curriculum, pointed toward getting on with the business of the world, and the idea that a child, as child, might have a legitimate other approach to the experience was rejected, out of hand, as inefficient.

Life is learning. Learning is life. Modes and structures have to change when they no longer meet the needs for which they were created. The world is not knowable in the way we thought. No need to document here the obsolescence and fatality rate of the presently known. You can and should know some things. But your best bet is to know how to know, how to explore, how to find out more. The question of what is worth knowing or learning has never sufficiently taken into account the principal party to the process – the learner himself. This is insane, and in itself has probably contributed more to the give-up, fed-up, drop-out rate of potential learners than any other single factor.

A person's best and most consuming reason for wanting to know anything – to know how to know, to explore, and to find out more – is that he *wants* to know. In interaction with a good teacher, both pupil and teacher will gain more than either put in alone, and the range and variety of what is worth knowing to any

given human spirit is boundless. One of the most telling criticisms of "school" today is the number of children who despise it.

I have suggested that the limits of the content and process of learning have been dictated by the historical function of the school in relation to society. That too is changing and must be reevaluated. What are we educating people for? What is the purpose of it all? There is more leisure time in this part of the world for more people today than ever before because of affluence, reduced work weeks, unemployment, retirement, and doubtless many other reasons. There are more hours in the day than the resources of many can fill. There are children at loose ends hanging around the shopping center, the motorcycle mart, the drug scene; young and old are watching television by the hour; and the leisure lethargy is going to increase. Why? Because many people simply do not know what to do with themselves, and their rearing and learning experiences have limited rather than expanded their inborn potential.

The purpose of education today has to be to bring as many children as possible to the fruition of themselves, in consideration and in tune with their fellow human beings, in interaction with as many experiences as can be packed into the classrooms of both their schools and their environment, so that there will be plenty to choose from, and plenty to grow on, each in his own way.

I have worked in several educational settings: regularly for about eight years in an independent elementary school, tangentially in specialized remedial schools, after-school supplementary education programs for the disadvantaged, and this public-supported infant school in London. The children in these settings have ranged from those of rich and broadly based backgrounds to the severely disadvantaged on every possible criterion.

Involvement in after-school compensatory tutoring programs proved to be an eye-opening exercise in professional blundering and frustration. Like many other teachers, during the current human rights revolution, I wanted to "do" something, so I volunteered to help teach reading. It was obvious from the beginning that the choice of task was wrong. Children who couldn't talk couldn't learn to read. But the right approach was not obvious, at the time, and the situation, moreover, was a double bind. The children themselves, and their parents, genuinely and sincerely wanted a "better education," but they saw the hallmarks of that better education as the reading and computation skills which they knew other children were mastering. They felt

they were being sold out if they got anything less, themselves. This is Mrs. Kay's Inevitable Question foreshadowed in a sooner scene.

I talked a great deal with these children; brought a couple home to play with my daughter; took walks and excursions with them, and some photography tours; played games and worked on the reading. But it was hopeless. The reasons why boys of eleven and thirteen couldn't read "cat" were too deeply tangled in a developmental mess that could never be straightened out once a week after school for an hour and a half on a Tuesday afternoon. In retrospect, the usefulness of failure was the exposure in some depth to the population and experiential vacuum for which the open classroom is most urgently needed. I agree with Mrs. Kay that any child can benefit, but some children will not find their benefits anywhere if they don't find them in a nourishing school.

As an example of the opposite case, eight years in an independent school showed me caring relationships, good teaching, comfortable children, and good educational results in a quite traditional setting. Not all prescriptions work well for all children. Formal methods worked very well for this group, and I'm sure two good reasons for this were that respect for individuality was high among our teacher commitments to the children, and most of the children were getting their rich variety of experience all around their lives – at home, at school, after school, and around the community.

The mass of inner-city children in this country have no such opportunities. Cultural deprivation looks the same wherever you find it. Substitute ghetto black slang for Cockney English, and Jerry Lee in Roxbury, Massachusetts, is not very different from Simon in London. For these children, above all, the open classroom comes as close as anything I have seen to meeting crucial personal, social, and conceptual needs.